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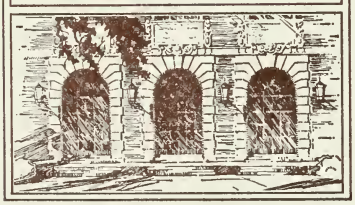

THE

CHAPLAIN OF THE FLEET

A Novel

BY

WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE

AUTHORS OF
'THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY,' 'THE MONKS OF THELEMA,' 'READY-MONEY MORTIBOY,' 'BY CELIA'S ARBOUR,' 'THIS SON OF VULCAN,' 'MY LITTLE GIRL,' 'THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT,' 'WITH HARP AND CROWN,' 'WHEN THE SHIP COMES HOME,' ETC., ETC.

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THE

CHAPLAIN OF THE FLEET.

PART I.

WITHIN THE RULES.

CHAPTER I.

HOW KITTY LOST HER FATHER AND HER FRIENDS.

My life has been (above any merits of my own) so blessed by Providence, that methinks its history should be begun with the ringing of bells, the singing of psalms, the sound of cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music. For surely the contemplation of a happy course should, even towards its close, be accompanied by a heart full of cheerful piety and gratitude. And though, as often happens to us in the Lord's wisdom,

ill fortune, disappointment, troubles of the flesh, and pain of disease may perhaps afflict me in these latter years of fleeting life, they ought not to lessen the glad song of praise for blessings formerly vouchsafed (and still dwelling in my memory) of love, of joy, and of happiness. Truly, the earth is a delightful place; a fair garden, which yields pleasant fruit; and, if it may be so said with becoming reverence, there are yet, outside the gates of Eden, places here and there which for beauty and delight, to those who thither win their way, are comparable with Paradise itself. In such a place it has been my happy lot to dwell.

Yet, just as the newborn babe begins his earthly course with a wail—ah, joyful cry for ear of mother!—so must this book begin with tears and weeping.

The weeping is that of an orphan over her dead father; the tears are those which fall upon a coffin beside an open grave: they are the tears of men and women come to pay this reverence at the burial of a man who was their best friend and their most faithful servant.

All the morning the funeral knell has been tolling; the people listen, now, to the solemn words of a service which seems spoken by the dead man himself to those who mourn. They admonish and warn, but they bid them be of good cheer, lift up hearts, and trust in the Lord.

When we are in great grief and sorrow, outward things seem to affect us more than in ordinary times, when the heart is in repose and the mind, perhaps, slower of apprehension. The day, for instance, was late in May; the blackbird, thrush, and chaffinch were singing in the wood beside the church; a lark was carolling in the sky; a cuckoo was calling from a coppice; the hedges were green, and the trees were bright with their first fresh foliage; the white may-blossom, the yellow laburnum, and the laylock were at their best, and the wild roses were just beginning.

To the country girl who had never yet left her native village, this joy of the spring was so natural that it did not jar upon the grief of her soul. When the funeral was over, and the grave filled in and the people all dis-

persed, she stood for a few moments alone, and then walked away across the long grass of the churchyard, stepping lightly over the graves of the villagers, opened the little wicket-gate which led to the vicarage garden, passed in, and sought a sheltered place where, beneath the shade of bushes, she sat upon a bench and folded her hands, looked before her, and fell a-thinking.

She was between sixteen and seventeen, but tall of her age, and looked older; she wore a new black frock; she had thrown her straw hat with black ribbons upon the bench beside her. As for her face, I suppose it was pretty. Alas! I am a hypocrite, because I *know* that it was pretty. As yet, she did not know it, and had never thought about her face. Her eyes were brown (she has ever been thankful to have had brown eyes); her features were regular, and her face rather long; her hair was abundant and soft: it was like the hair of most English maidens, of a dark brown, or chestnut (it is now white); her arms were shapely, and her fingers thin and delicate (they were the fingers of a Pleydell); as for her complexion,

it was as good as can be expected in a girl whose blood is pure, who has, as yet, known no late hours, who has been taught to use plenty of cold water and no washes or messes, who has run about without thinking of freckles, and has lived in the open air on homely food. In other words, as fine a show of red and white was in the cheeks of that child as ever Sir Joshua Reynolds tried to copy upon canvas.

She was thinking many things. First, of her father and his death ; of the funeral, and the grief shown by people whom she had thought to be hard of heart, insensible to his admonitions, and untouched by his prayers. Yet they stood about the grave and wept, rude women and rough men. Would they ever again find a minister so benevolent, so pious, and so active in all good works ? She thought of the house, and how dark and lonely it was, deserted by its former owner. She thought of what she should do, in the time before her, and how she would be received in her new home. One thing comforted her : she looked older than she was, and was tall and strong. She could be helpful.

Then she drew out of her pocket a letter written for her only three days before her father died. She knew it quite by heart, but yet she read it again slowly, as if there might still be something in it which had escaped her.

'My beloved Daughter' (thus it ran),

'Knowing that I am about to die and to appear before my Father and merciful Judge, it is right that I should bestir myself to make thee comprehend the situation in which thou wilt be placed. Of worldly wealth I have, indeed, but little to give thee. Face thy lot with hope, resignation, and a cheerful heart. The righteous man, said one who knew, hath never been found to beg his bread. Indeed, the whole course of this world is so ordered (by Divine wisdom), that he who chooseth the narrow path, chooseth also the safest. Therefore, be of good cheer.

'*Imprimis.* When I am buried, search the bedstead, and, in the head thereof, will be found a bag containing the sum of one hundred guineas in gold pieces. I have

saved this money during my twenty years of incumbency. I trust that it will not be laid to my charge that I did not give this also to the poor; but I thought of my daughter first. Secondly, Farmer Goodpenny is indebted to me in the sum of twenty-two pounds, four shillings, and eightpence, for which I have his note. I charge thee that he be not asked to pay interest, and since it may be that he hath not the money, let it wait his good time. He is an honest man, who fears God. Thirdly, there is money, some twelve pounds or more, lying in my desk for present use. Fourthly, there are several small sums due to me, money put out and lent (but not at usury), such as five shillings from the widow Coxon, and other amounts the which I will have thee forgive and remit entirely; for these my debtors are poor people. The horse is old, but he will fetch five pounds, and the cow will sell for two. As for the books, they may be sent to Maidstone, where they may be sold. But I doubt they will not bring more than ten guineas, or thereabouts, seeing that the call for works of divinity is small, even among

my brethren of the cloth. And when you go to London, forget not to ask of Mr. Longman, publisher, of St. Paul's Churchyard, an account of my "Sermons," published by him last year; my essay on "Philo-Judæus," issued four years ago; and my "Reflections on the Christian State," which he hath by him in manuscript. He will perhaps be able to return a larger sum of money than I was led by him at first to expect.

'My will and plain injunctions are as follows:

'When everything has been paid that is owing, and there are none who can hereafter say that he had a claim upon me which was unsatisfied, get together thy wearing apparel and effects, and under some proper protection, as soon as such can be found, go to London, and there seek out thy uncle and mother's brother, the Reverend Gregory Shovel, Doctor of Divinity, of whom I have spoken to thee of old. I take shame to myself that I have not sent him, for many years, letters of brotherly friendship. Nor do I rightly remember where he is to be found. But I know that he lives, because

once a year there comes to me a keg or anker of rum, which I know must be from him, and which I have drunk with my parishioners in a spirit of gratitude. Perhaps it would have been more consistent in a brother clergyman to have sent one of the latest books of our scholars. But he means well, and the rum is, I confess, of the best, and a generous drink, in moderation. He was once Curate and Lecturer of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields; but I would have thee go first to the Coffee House in St. Paul's Churchyard, where they know all the London clergy, and ask for his present lodging. This found, go to him, tell him that I am dead, give him thy money, entrust thyself to him, and be guided by him as thou hast been by me.

'And now, my daughter, if a father's prayers avail thee, be assured that I die like Jacob the patriarch, blessing thee and commanding thee. For my blessing, I pray that the Lord may have thee in His keeping, and give thee what is good for the eternal life. For my commandment—Be good: for herein is summed up the whole of the Commandments.

'And remember, my child, the Christian who lives in fear of death is foolish: even as he is foolish who will not lay hold of the promise, and so lives in terror of the Judgment. For now I know—yea, I *know*—that the Lord loveth best that man who all the days of his life walks in faith and dies in hope.

'Your loving father,

'LAWRENCE PLEYDELL.'

Had ever a girl so sweet a message from the dead, to keep and ponder over, to comfort and console her? She knew every word of it already, but the tears came afresh to her eyes in thinking of the dear hand which wrote those words—quiet now, its labours done, in the cold grave. Her father's last Will and Testament gave her more than riches—it gave her strength and consolation. The example of his life, which was so Christian and so good, might be forgotten, because the girl was too young to understand it, and too ignorant to compare; but this letter of true faith and religion would never be forgotten.

The Reverend Lawrence Pleydell, Master of Arts and sometime Fellow of the ancient and learned College or House of Christ, Cambridge, was (which is a thing too rare in these days) a country clergyman who was also a scholar, a divine, a man of pious thought, and a gentleman by descent, though only of a younger branch. It is too often found that if a country clergyman be a gentleman, he continues the habits of his class, such as fox-hunting, card-playing, and wine-drinking, concerning which, although the Bishops seem not yet of one mind upon the matter, I for my humble part, remembering what kind of man was my good father, venture to think are pursuits unworthy of one who holds a cure of souls. And when a clergyman is a scholar, he is too often devoted entirely to the consideration of his Greek and Latin authors, whereby his power over the hearts of the people is in a measure lost. Or, if he is a divine, he is too often (out of the fulness of his mind) constrained to preach the subtleties and hidden things of theology, which cannot be understood of the common people, so that it is as if he were speaking in

an unknown tongue. And sometimes the parson of the parish is but a rude and coarse person, of vulgar birth, who will smoke tobacco with the farmers—yea, even with the labourers—drink with them, and not be ashamed to be seen in beer-houses, tap-rooms, or even at such unseemly diversions as bull-baiting, badger-drawing, and cock-fighting. It were to be wished that the Church were purged of all such.

The parish contained, besides farmers, but one family of gentlefolk, that of Sir Robert Levett, Knight, who with his wife and two children lived at the Hall, and had an estate worth two thousand a year at least. When the vicar's wife died (she was somewhat his inferior in point of family, but had a brother in the Church), and his child was left without a mother, nothing would do for Lady Levett than that the little maid should be taken into the Hall and brought up, having governesses and teaching, with her own daughter, Nancy, who was of about the same age, but a little younger. So the two girls were playfellows and scholars together, being taught those things which it befits a lady to

learn, although one of them would be a poor lady indeed. There was one son, Will, who was at first at Eton with his cousin (and Sir Robert's ward), Harry Temple, the young Squire of Wootton Hampstead. It was a fearful joy when they came home for the holidays. For, although they kept the house in activity and bustle, making disorder and noise where there was generally quiet and order, yet after the manner of boys, who rejoice to show and feel their strength, they would play rough tricks upon the two girls, upset and destroy their little sports, and make them understand what feeble things are young maidens compared with boys.

Now just as the two girls were different—for one grew up tall and disposed to be serious, which was Kitty Pleydell, and the other was small and saucy, always with a laugh and a kiss, which was Nancy Levett—so the boys became different: for one, which was Will Levett, a rosy-cheeked lad, with a low forehead and a square chin, grew to dislike learning of all kinds, and was never happy except when he was in the stables with the horses, or training the dogs, or fox-

hunting, or shooting, or fishing, or in some way compassing the death of wild creatures, sports to which his father was only moderately addicted; but the other, Harry Temple, was more studiously disposed, always came home with some fresh mark of his master's approbation, and read every book he could find.

There came a change in their behaviour to the girls as they grew older. Will ceased to set a dog to bark at them, and to crack a whip to frighten them, or ride unbroken colts in order to make them cry out for fear; and Harry ceased to tease and torment them with little tricks and devices of mischief at which they were half pleased and half humiliated.

When the boys left school they were sent to Pembroke College, Cambridge, a college in which many generations of Levetts had been educated. After two terms, Will came home, looking cheerful though somewhat abashed. He had been rusticated *sine die*, as the phrase runs: which means that he was not to go back again until he had made such ample submission and apology, with promises of

future amendment, as would satisfy the authorities as to the safety of allowing him back.

It was not known rightly what he had done: there was a story in which a retriever, a horse, a punch-bowl, a badger, a bargee, a pump, and a water-trough were curiously mixed up, and his rustication had somehow to do with the introduction of a proctor (whom one understands to be a learned and reverend magistrate) and a bull-dog, into this inconsistent and discordant company.

Sir Robert looked grave when he received his son, my lady wept, and the girls were ashamed; but all speedily recovered their good spirits, and the whole stable rejoiced exceedingly to see Will back among them. Even the foxes and their cubs, Sir Robert said, which had of late waxed fat and lazy, manifested a lively pleasure, and hastened to get thin so as to afford the greatest sport possible; the trout practised all their tricks in readiness for one who respected a fish of subtlety; the pheasants and young partridges made haste to grow strong on the wing: the snipe and small birds remembered why Nature

had taught them to use a devious and uncertain flight; the rabbits left off running straight; the otters remembered the uncertainty of life and the glory of a gallant fight: the ferrets laughed, thinking of the merry days they were going to have; the hares, who never take any solid interest in being hunted, ran away to the neighbouring estates; and the badgers, who were going to be drawn in their holes, turned sulky.

This was what Sir Robert told the girls, who laughed, but believed that it was all true. As for Cambridge, there was no more thought of that. Will had had enough of lectures, chapels, and dons; henceforth, he said, he should please himself.

'Man,' said Sir Robert, 'who is ever disappointed, must continually be resigned. What if Will hath refused to get learning? He will not, therefore, gamble away the estate, nor disgrace the name of Levett. Holdfast is a good dog. It is the fortune of this house that if, once in a while, its head prove a fool as regards books, he still sticks to his own.'

Will promised to stick fast to his own, and

though he gave himself up henceforth altogether to those pursuits which make a man coarse and deaden his sensibility (whereby he loses the best part of his life), he promised, in his father's opinion, to prove a capable manager and just landlord, jealous of his own rights, and careful of those of others.

Will thus remaining at home, the girls saw him every day, and though they had little talk with him, because it could not be expected that they should care to hear how the dogs behaved, and how many rats had been killed that morning, yet he was, in his rough way, thoughtful of them, and would bring them such trifles as pretty eggs, stuffed kingfishers, dressed moleskins, and so forth, which he got in his walks abroad. In the evening he would make his artificial flies, twist his lines, mend his landing-nets, polish his guns; being always full of business, and kindly taking no notice while Nancy or Kitty read aloud, nor seeming to care what they read, whether it was the poetry of Pope or some dear delightful romance; or the 'Spectator,' or the plays of Shakespeare. All was one to him.

He seemed in those days a good-natured young man who went his own way and troubled himself not one whit about other people. Women were inferior creatures, of course : they could not shoot, hunt, fish, ride to hounds; they had no strength ; they did not like to see things killed ; they did not love sport ; they did not drink wine ; they did not take beer for breakfast ; they did not smoke tobacco ; they loved tea, chocolate, coffee, and such vanities ; they loved to dress fine and stand up making bows to men, which they called dancing ; they loved to read a lot of nonsense in rhymes, or to cry over the sorrows of people who never lived. Women, however, had their uses : they kept things in order, looked after the dinner, and took care of the babies.

Will did not say all these things at once ; but they were collected together and written down by the girls, who kept a book between them, where they entered all the things they heard which struck their fancy. Nancy even went so far as to try to make up a story about the proctor and the pump, but never dared show it, except to her father, who

pinched her ear and laughed. They called the page about the ways of women 'Will's Wisdom,' and continually added to it without his knowledge; because Will, like all men who love the sports of the field and not the wisdom of the printed page, became quickly angry if he were laughed at. The girls always pictured Esau, for instance, as a grave man, with a square chin, who talked a good deal about his own hunting, took no interest in the occupations of the women, and could never see a joke.

Two years or so after Will's rustication, Harry came of age and left Cambridge without taking a degree. There were bonfires, and oxen roasted whole, and barrels of beer upon the green when he took possession of his own estate and went to live in his own house, which was three miles and a half from the Hall.

He came from Cambridge having no small reputation for learning and wit, being apt at the making of verses in English, Latin, and Italian. He was, moreover, skilled in mathematical science, and especially in astronomy; he had read history, and understood the course

of politics. I think that from the beginning he aspired to be considered one of those who by birth and attainments are looked upon as the leaders of the world; he would be a scholar as well as a gentleman; he would be a poet, perhaps to be ranked with Pope or Dryden; he would be a man of fashion; and he would sit in ladies *salons*, while other men sat over bottles of port, and talked gallantry. As for his appearance, he was tall and slight in figure; his face was long and rather thin; his eyes were grave; his manner was reserved; to the girls he was always courteous, asking their opinion, setting them right when they were wrong, lending them books, and directing them what to read. To Kitty he was a man to be respected, but never, she may truly say, did she allow her thoughts to dwell on the possibility of love: perhaps because love is between opposites, so that the grave may love the gay; perhaps because she knew very early that Lady Levett earnestly desired one thing—that Harry might fall in love with Nancy; and perhaps because to Nancy herself, little, merry Nancy, whose heart was full of sunshine as her eyes were full of sunlight,

and her lips never moved but to say and sing something saucy, or to laugh and smile—to Nancy, I say, this man was as an Apollo, and she wondered that all women, not to speak of men (whose stupidity in the matter of reverence for each other is well known) did not fall down before him and do him open worship.

A few months after Harry Temple came of age, the vicar was taken ill with a putrid fever, caught while administering the last rights of the Church to a dying woman, and was carried off in a fortnight. This disaster not only robbed poor Kitty of the best of fathers, but also of the kindest patron and the most loving friend; for it took her away from the Hall, and drove her out, as will be presently seen, to meet dangers she had never imagined among a people whose wickedness after many years, and even to this day, makes her wonder at the longsuffering of the Lord.

CHAPTER II.

HOW KITTY MADE ENGAGEMENTS.

The day after the funeral, Sir Robert Levett himself walked to the Vicarage in the afternoon, and found the girl still in the garden, on her favourite seat. As soon as she looked into his kind face she burst into fresh tears.

'Cry on, pretty,' he said, sitting beside her, and with a tear in his own eye. 'Cry on; to cry is natural. Thou hast lost the best and most Christian father that ever girl had; therefore cry on till thou art tired. Let the tears fall. Don't mind me. Out handkerchief. So good a scholar shall we never see again. Cry on, if thou hast only just begun, should it bring thee comfort. Nor ever shall we hear so good a preacher. When thou hast finished let me have my say. But do not hurry.

Even at the very saddest, when tears flow as unceasingly as the fountains in the Land of Canaan, the sight of an elderly gentleman sitting on a bench beneath a mulberry-tree, his hat beside him, his wig in his hands for coolness, his stick between his legs, and his face composed to a decent patience, waiting till one had finished, would be enough to make any girl stop crying. Kitty felt immediately inclined to laugh; dried her eyes, restrained her sobs, and pulled out her father's will, which she gave to Sir Robert to read.

He read it through twice, slowly, and then he hummed and coughed before he spoke:

'A good man, Kitty child. See that thou forget not his admonitions. I would he were here still to admonish us all. Sinners that we were, to heed his voice no better. And now he is gone—he is gone. Yet he was a younger man than I, by ten years and more, and I remain.' Here he put on his wig and rose. 'As for this money, child, let us lose no time in making that safe, lest some thief should rob thee of it. A hundred guineas! And twenty more with Farmer Goodpenny!

And this money waiting at the publisher's!* Verily thou art an heiress, indeed!'

In the bedroom, at the head of the great bed, they found beneath the mattress a long narrow box secretly let into the panel close to the great cross-beam. I say secretly, but it was a secret known to all the world. Carpenters always made those secret hiding-places in beds, so that had there been a robber in the house he would have begun by searching in that place. Sir Robert knew where to find the spring, and quickly opened the box.

Within it lay two canvas bags, tied up. Could bags so little hold so great a sum? Sir Robert tossed them into his pockets as carelessly as if they were bags of cherries.

'Now, little maid,' said he, sitting on the bed, 'that money is safe; and be sure that I shall call on Farmer Goodpenny to-morrow. Let me know what is to be done about thy father's wish that thou shouldst go to London?'

*When, some months later, Kitty went to the publisher, that gentleman informed her that there was no money to receive, because he had been a loser by the publication of the books.

'It is his injunction, sir,' said Kitty, gravely. 'I must obey his will.'

'Yet thy father, 'child, did not know London. And to send a young girl like thyself, with a bag of guineas about thy neck, to ask in a coffee-house for the address of a clergyman is, methinks, a wild-goose sort of business. As for Dr. Shovel, I have heard the name—to be sure, it cannot be the same man——' he stopped, as if he would not tell me what it was he had heard.

'It is my father's command,' she repeated.

'Unless nothing better should be found. Now, London is a dangerous place, full of pitfalls and traps, especially for the young and innocent. We are loth to leave thee, Kitty; we are afraid to let thee go. Nothing will do for Lady Levett but that thou remain behind with us and Nancy.'

This was a generous offer, indeed. Kitty's eyes filled with tears again, and while she stood trying to find words of gratitude, and to decline the offer so as not to appear churlish, madam herself came running up the stairs, in her garden-hat and plain pinner, and fell to kissing and crying over the girl.

Then she had to be told of the will and last commands.

'To be sure,' she said, 'thy father's commands must be respected and obeyed. Yet I know not whether it would not be well to disobey them. Kitty, my dear, stay with us and be my daughter, all the same as Nancy. I do not ask thee to enter my service, or to receive wages, or to do work for me any other than a daughter may.'

Kitty shook her head again. She was truly grateful: there was no one so kind as her ladyship; but she must go to London as her father bade her.

'Why,' cried Sir Robert, 'the child is right. Let her go. But if she is unhappy with her friends, or if she is in any trouble, let her know where to look for help.'

'There may be cousins,' said madam, 'who will find thee too pretty for their own faces, and would keep thee at home with the towels and dusters and napkins. I would not have our Kitty a Cinderella—though house-service is no disgrace to a gentlewoman. Or there may be manners and customs of the house that a young girl should disapprove. Or

there may be harsh looks instead of kind words. If that is the case, Kitty, come back to us, who love thee well, and will receive thee with kisses and joy.'

Then they left her in the empty house, alone with Deborah, the house servant.

She was looking over her father's books, and taking out one or two which she thought she might keep in memory of him (as if anything were needed) when she heard steps, and Deborah's voice inviting some one to enter.

It was Harry Temple; he stood in the doorway, his hat in his hand, and under his arm a book.

'I was meditating in the fields,' he said, 'what I should say to Kitty Pleydell, in consolation for her affliction. The learned Boethius——'

'Oh, Harry!' she cried, 'do not talk to me of books. What can they say to comfort anyone?'

He smiled. Harry's smile showed how much he pitied people not so learned as himself.

'The greatest men,' he said, 'have been

comforted by books. Cicero, for instance . . Nay, Kitty, I will not quote Cicero. I came to say that I am sorry indeed to learn that we shall lose thee for a time.'

'Alas!' she said, 'I must go. It is my father's order.'

'I am sure,' he replied, 'that you would not leave us for a lighter reason. You know our hearts, Kitty, and how we all love you.'

'I know——' Kitty began to cry again. Everybody was so full of love and pity. 'I know, Harry. And perhaps I shall never n—n—never see you again.'

'And does that make this parting harder?' He turned very red, and laid his precious book of consolation on the table.

'Why, of course it does,' she replied, wiping her eyes.

'You *shall* see us again,' he went on earnestly. 'You shall come back with me. Kitty, I will give you one twelvemonth of absence. You know I love you tenderly. But your father's commands must be obeyed. Therefore for a whole year I shall not seek you out. Then, when I come for you, will you return with me, never to go away again?'

'Oh!' she cried, clasping her hands, 'how joyfully will I return!'

The young man took her hand and raised it to his lips.

'Divine maid!' he cried. 'Fit to grace a coronet, or to make the home of a simple gentleman an Arcadia of pastoral pleasure!'

'Do not mock me, Harry,' she said, snatching away her hand, 'with idle compliments. But forget not to come and carry me away.'

'Alas!' he said; 'how shall I exist—how bear this separation for twelve long months? Oh! divine Kitty! Thou wilt remain an ever-present idea in my heart.'

'Harry,' she burst out laughing in her tears, 'think of the learned Boethius!'

So he left her.

In half an hour another visitor appeared.

This time it was Will. He was in his usual careless disorder; his scarlet coat a good deal stained, his waistcoat unbuttoned, his wig awry, his boots dusty, his neckerchief torn, his hands and cheeks browned by the sun. He carried a horse-whip, and was followed by half-a-dozen dogs, who came crowding into the room after him.

'So,' he said, sitting down and leaning his chin upon his whipstock, 'thou must go, then?'

'What do you want with me, Will?' she asked, angry that he should show so little sympathy.

'Why,' he replied, rubbing his chin with the whipstock, 'not much, Kitty. Nancy will come to cry.'

'Then you can go away, Will.'

'I came to say, Kitty, that though you do be going to go' (Will easily dropped into country talk), 'I shanna forget thee. There!'

'Thank you, Will.'

'As for the matter of that, I love thee—ah! like I love old Rover here.'

'Thank you again, Will.'

'And so I've brought along a sixpence—here it is—and we'll break it together.' Here he bent and broke the coin with his strong fingers. 'My half goes into my pocket—so; and the other half in thine—there.' He threw it on the table. 'Well, that's done.' He stood up, looked at me sorrowfully, and heaved a great sigh. 'I doubt I've a-done wrong. Hadst been going to stay, a' woulden a' spoke yet awhile. Liberty

is sweet—girls are skittish. Well, we'll take a twelvemonth yet. There's no hurry. Plenty time before us. I shall have my liberty for that while. Mayhap I will fetch thee in the spring. Ay, May's the best month to leave the dogs and the birds, though the vermin will begin to swarm—rot 'em! Come, Rover. Good-bye, wench.'

He gave her a resounding kiss on the cheek, and turned away.

The girl laughed. She did not pick up the broken sixpence, which, indeed, she hardly noticed, her mind being full of many things.

Presently Nancy came, and the two girls spent a miserable evening together, in great love and friendship.

Now, how could an ignorant country girl, who had never thought over these things at all, guess that she had engaged herself to be married, in one day, in one hour even, to two different men? Yet that was exactly what this foolish Kitty had actually done.

CHAPTER III.

HOW WE CAME TO LONDON ON THE COACH.

With the purpose, therefore, of carrying out my father's injunctions, I remained for a few days at the Vicarage alone, having one servant to take care of me. But, had it not been for an accident, I might have remained at the village all my life. 'For,' said Lady Levett, 'it is but right, child, that the instructions of your father should be carried out; I should like to know, however, who is to take charge of thee to London, and how we are to get thee there? A young maid cannot be sent to London on a pack-horse, like a bundle of goods. As for Sir Robert, he goes no more to town, since he has ceased to be a member. I care not for the court, for my own part, and am now too old for the gaieties of London.

Nancy will enjoy them, I doubt not, quite soon enough; and as for the boys, I see not very well how they can undertake so great a charge. I doubt, Kitty, that thou must come to the Hall, after all. You can be useful, child, and we will make you happy. There is the still-room, where, heaven knows, what with the cowslip-wine, the strong waters, the conserving, pickling, drying, candying, and the clove gilliflowers for palletting, there is work enough for you and Nancy, as well as my still-room maid and myself. And just now, Sir Robert calling every day for a summer sallet (which wants a light hand), to cool his blood!'

I would very willingly have gone to the Hall; I asked nothing better, and could think of nothing more happy for myself, if it could so be ordered. My father's wishes must certainly be obeyed; but if no one at the Hall could take charge of me, it seemed, at first, as if there could be no going to London at all, for our farmers and villagers were no great travellers. None of them knew much of this vast round world beyond their own fields, unless it were the nearest

market-town, or perhaps Maidstone, or even Canterbury. Now and again one of the rustics would go for a soldier (being crossed in love); but he never came home again to tell of his campaigns. Or one would go for a gentleman's servant (being too lazy to work like his father); then he would return filled with all the wickedness of London, and stay corrupting the minds of the simple folk, till Sir Robert bade him pack and be off, for a pestilent fellow. Or one would go away to the nearest market-town to be apprenticed to a handicraft (being ambitious, as will happen even to simple clods, and aspiring to a shop). But if he succeeded, such an one would seldom come back to the place which gave him birth.

An accident happened which served my purpose. There was a certain farmer on Sir Robert's estate, whose sister had married a London tradesman of respectability and reputed honesty, named Samuel Gambit (he was a builder's foreman, who afterwards became a master builder, and made great sums of money by taking city contracts. His son, after him, rose to be an alderman in the city

of London). Whether the young woman was in ill health, or whether she was prompted by affection, I know not, but she left her husband for a space and journeyed into the country to see her friends and people. Now when I heard, by accident, that she was about to return, my heart fell, because I saw that my time was come, and that a proper person to take charge of me during the journey was found in Mrs. Gambit.

Madam sent for her. She was a strong, well-built woman, of about six or seven and twenty, resolute in her bearing, and sturdy of speech. She was not afraid, she said, of any dangers of the road, holding (but that was through ignorance) highwaymen in contempt; but she could not be answerable, she said, and this seemed reasonable, for the safety of the coach, which might upset and break our necks. As for the rest, she would be proud to take the young lady with her to London, and madam might, if she wished, consider the extra trouble worth something; but that she left to her ladyship.

'I know,' said Lady Levett, 'that it is a great charge for you to conduct a young gen-

tlewoman to town in these bad and dangerous times, when not only the high roads are thronged with robbers, and the streets with footpads, but also the very inns swarm with villains, and gentlemen are not ashamed to insult young persons of respectability in stage-coaches and public places. But Kitty is a good girl, not giddy, and obedient. I will admonish her that she obey you in everything upon the road, and that she keep eyes, ears, and mouth closed all the way.'

The good woman undertook to have her eye upon me the whole journey. Then Lady Levett made her promise that she would take me straight to St. Paul's Coffee House, St. Paul's Churchyard, there to inquire after my uncle's residence, and never leave me until she had seen me deposited safely in Dr. Shovel's hands.

Now was I in a flutter and agitation of spirits indeed, as was natural, considering that I was going to leave my native place for the first time in my life and to seek out new relations.

'Nancy!' I cried, 'what will be my lot? What will become of me?'

Nancy said that she would tell my fortune if I would only leave off walking about and wringing my hands and be comfortable.

Then she sat down beside me in her pretty, affectionate way, and threw her arms round my waist, and laid her head upon my shoulder.

'You are so tall and so pretty, Kitty, that all the men will lose their hearts. But you must listen to none of them until the right man comes. Oh! I know what he is like. He will be a great nobleman, young and handsome, and oh, so rich! he will kneel at your feet as humble as a lover ought to be, and implore you to accept his title and his hand. And when you are a great lady, riding in your own coach, as happy as the day is long, you will forget—oh no, my dear! sure I am you will never forget your loving Nancy.'

Then we kissed and cried over each other in our foolish girls' way, promising not only kind remembrance, but even letters sometimes. And we exchanged tokens of friendship. I gave her a ring, which had been my mother's, made of solid silver with a turquoise

and two pearls, very rich and good, and she gave me a silver-gilt locket with chased back, and within it a little curl of her hair, brown and soft.

Lady Levett gave me nothing but her admonition. I was going, she said, to a house where I should meet with strangers who would perhaps, after the manner of strangers, be quicker at seeing a fault than a grace, and this particularly at the outset and very beginning, when people are apt to be suspicious and to notice carefully. Therefore I was to be circumspect in my behaviour, and, above all, be careful in my speech, giving soft words in return for hard, and answering railing, if there was any railing, with silence. But perhaps, she said, there would be no railing, but only kindness and love, in the which case I was all the more to preserve sweet speech and sweet thoughts, so as not to trouble love. Then she was good enough to say that I had ever been a good maid and dutiful, and she doubted not that so I would continue in my new world, wherefore she kissed me tenderly, and prayed, with tears in her eyes—for my lady, though quick and

sharp, was wondrous kind of heart—that the Lord would have me in His keeping.

I say nothing about Sir Robert, because he was always fond of me, and would almost as soon have parted from his Nancy.

Now it was a week and more since I had, without knowing it, received those overtures of love from Harry Temple and Will, which I took in my innocence for mere overtures of friendship and brotherly affection. They thought, being conceited, like all young men, that I had at once divined their meaning and accepted their proposals; no doubt they gave themselves credit for condescension and me for gratitude. Therefore, when, the evening before I came away, Harry Temple begged me, with many protestations of regret, not to inform Sir Robert or madam of his intentions, I knew not what to say. What intentions? why should I not?

'Reigning star of Beauty!' he cried, laying his hand upon his heart, 'I entreat thy patience for a twelvemonth. Alas! such separation! who can bear it!

'"Fond Thyrsis sighs, through mead and vale,
His absent nymph lamenting——"'

'Oh, Harry!' I cried, 'what do I care about Thyrsis and absent nymphs? You have promised to bring me back in a year. Very well, then, I shall expect you. Of course you can tell Sir Robert whatever you please. It is nothing to me what you tell Sir Robert or my lady.'

'She is cold as Diana,' said Harry, with a prodigious sigh; but I broke from him, and would hear no more of such nonsense. Sighing shepherds and cruel nymphs were for ever on Harry Temple's lips.

As for Will, of course he wanted to have an explanation too. He followed Harry, and, in his rustic way, begged to say a word or two.

'Pray go on, Will,' I said.

'I promised a twelvemonth,' he explained. 'I'll not go back upon my word. I *did* say a twelvemonth.'

'A twelvemonth? Oh yes. You said the same as Harry, I remember.'

'I don't know what Harry said, but I'll swear, whatever Harry said, I said just the clean contrary. Now then, liberty's sweet, my girl. Come, let us say fifteen months. Lord!

when a man is twenty-one he don't want to be tied by the heels all at once. Let's both have our run first. You are but a filly yet—ay—a six-months' puppy, so to say.'

'You said a twelvemonth, Will,' I replied, little thinking of what he meant. How, indeed, could I know? 'I shall expect you in a twelvemonth.'

'Very good, then. A twelvemonth it must be, I suppose. Shan't tell my father yet, Kitty. Don't you tell un neyther, there's a good girl. Gad! there will be a pretty storm with my lady when she hears it! Ho! ho!'

Then he went off chuckling and shaking himself. How could a courtly gentleman like Sir Robert and a gentlewoman like her ladyship have a son who was so great a clown in his manner and his talk? But the sons do not always take after their parents. A stable and a kennel, when they take the place of a nursery and a school, are apt to breed such bumpkins even out of gentle blood.

In the morning at five I was to start in the cart which would take us across the country to the stage-coach.

Nancy got up with me, and we had a fine farewell kissing. The boys were up too; Harry out of compliment to me, dressed in a nightcap and a flowered morning-gown; and Will out of compliment to his kennel, for whose sake he always rose at daybreak. He was dressed in his old scarlet coat, he carried a whip in one hand, and half-a-dozen dogs followed at his heels.

'Remember, sweet Kitty,' whispered Harry, with a ceremonious bow, 'it is but for a twelvemonth.'

'Only a year,' said Will. 'Heart up, my pretty!'

They heard what each had said, and they were looking at each other puzzled when I drove away.

'What did you mean, Will?' asked Harry, when the cart was out of sight, 'by saying only a twelvemonth?'

'I meant what I meant,' he replied doggedly. 'Perhaps you know, and perhaps you don't.'

'Of course I know,' said Harry. 'The question is, how do you know?'

'Well,' replied Will, 'that is a pretty odd

question, to be sure. How could I help knowing ?'

'I think,' said Harry, red in the face, 'that some one has been injudicious in telling anyone.'

Will laughed.

'She ought not to have told, that's a fact. But we will keep it secret, Harry ; don't tell her ladyship.'

So that each thought that the other knew of his engagement with Kitty.

Little heed gave I to them and their promises. It was pleasant, perhaps, though I soon forgot to think about it at all, to remember that Harry and Will after a twelvemonth would come to carry me home again, and that I should never leave the old place again. But just then I was too sad to remember this. I was going away, heaven knew where, amongst strangers, to people who knew me not; and I mounted the cart in which we were to begin our journey crying as sadly as if it had been the dreadful cart which goes to Tyburn Tree. The best thing to cure a crying fit is a good jolting. It is impossible to weep comfortably when you are

shaken and rolled about in a country cart among the deep, hard ruts of last winter. So I presently put up my handkerchief, dried my eyes, and thought of nothing but of clinging to Mrs. Gambit when the wheels sank deeper than usual. The way lay along the lanes which I knew so well, arched over with trees and lofty hedges, then in their beautiful spring dressing. It led past the churchyard, where the sun was striking full upon my father's new-made grave. I tried to think of him, but the cart jolted so terribly that I was fain to remember only how I carried his last admonitions in my bosom, and the money in two bags sewn to my petticoats.

Presently the lane led on to the high-road, which was not quite so rough, and here we came to the roadside inn where the stage-coach changed horses. We waited an hour or so, until at length we saw it coming slowly up the hill, piled with packages and crowded with passengers. But there was room for two more, and we mounted to our places outside. Presently the machine moved slowly along again. It was so heavily-laden and the roads were so rough, that we rolled as if every

moment we were going to roll over into the ditch, where we should all be killed. Mrs. Gambit loudly declared that nothing should ever again take her out of London, where a body could ride in a coach without the fear of being upset and the breaking of necks. On this journey, however, no necks were broken, because the coach did not upset. When the rolling was very bad, Mrs. Gambit clutched me with one hand and her left-hand neighbour with the other. I, in my turn, seized her with one hand and my right-hand neighbour with the other. Then we both shrieked, until presently, finding that we did not actually go over, I began to laugh.

My neighbour was a clergyman of grave and studious aspect. He wore a full wig, which had certainly been a second-hand one when it was bought, so shabby was it now; his gown was also shabby, and his stockings were of grey worsted. Clearly a country clergyman of humble means. His face, however, looked young. When I caught him by the arm, he laid hold of my hand with both of his, saying, gravely, 'Now, madam, I hold you so tightly that you cannot fall.' This

was very kind of him. And, presently, he wanted to lay his arm round my waist for my better protection. But this was taking more trouble than I would consent to.

There was, however, a worse danger than that of upsetting. This year, England suffered from a plague of highway robbers, the like of which was never before known. The roads were crowded with them. They were mostly disbanded soldiers, who, being either disinclined to return to their old trades, or being unable to find employment, roamed about the country either singly or in pairs, or in bands, rogues and vagabonds, ready to rob, steal, plunder, or even murder as occasion offered. They were sometimes so bold that they would attack a whole coachful of passengers, and take from them whatever they carried, unless, as sometimes happened, there were one or two valiant men on the coach ready to give them a warm reception with guns, pistols, swords, or even stout cudgels. They were said seldom to show much fight (being conscious of the gallows awaiting them if they were wounded or captured), and would generally make off. But it was not always

that passengers were found ready to risk the fight, and in most cases they sat still and delivered.

With this danger before us, it was not surprising that the conversation should turn upon highwaymen whenever the road became a little smooth, and I listened with terror to the tales I heard. Most of them were related by a man who sat opposite to me. He wore a scratch wig (probably his second-best), and had his hat flapped and tied about his ears as if it were winter. He was, I suppose, a merchant of some kind, because he talked a great deal about prices, and stocks, and markets, with other things, Greek and Hebrew to me. Also, he looked so uneasy, and kept watching the road with so anxious an air, that I felt sure he must be carrying a great parcel of money, like me, and I longed to advise him to imitate my prudence ; and at the next town we got down to sew it within his coat. He continually lamented, as we went along, the desperate wickedness of the highway-robbers : he spoke of it as if he were entirely disinterested, and regarded not at all the peril to his own fortune, but only the

danger of their own souls, liable to be wretchedly lost and thrown away by their dreadful courses. And he talked so feelingly on this subject that one began to feel as if good words were being spoken to the edification of the soul. As for their suppression, he said that, in their own interests, strong measures would be necessary. Trade would never flourish, and therefore men would not be induced to follow a respectable trade until ships could sail the seas without fear of pirates, and honest merchants carry their property up and down the king's highway without fear of highwaymen. Here we came in sight of a man on horseback, and we all kept silence for an anxious space, till we discovered, by his great wig and black coat, that it was nothing but a country surgeon riding out to see a patient. Then the merchant went on to say that since the gallows did not terrify these evil-doers, he, for one, was for trying how they would like the French wheel.

At this there was a terrible outcry: the clergyman, especially, asking if he wished to introduce French barbarities.

'Such things,' he said solemnly, 'are the natural accompaniment of Popery. Pray, sir, remember Smithfield.'

'Sir,' said the merchant, 'I hope I am as good a Protestant as my neighbours. I call that, however, not barbarity but justice and mercy which punishes the guilty and deters the weak. As for barbarities, are we Protestants better than our neighbours? Is it not barbarous to flog our soldiers and sailors for insubordination; to flog our rogues at the cart-tail; to lash the backs of women in Bridewell; to cut and scourge the pickpockets so long as the alderman chooses to hold up the hammer? Do we not hack the limbs of our traitors, and stick them up on Temple Bar? Truly, the world would come to a pretty pass if we were to ask our cut-throats what punishment would hurt them least.'

'I like not the breaking of legs on wheels,' cried Mrs. Gambit. 'But to call the flogging of Bridewell hussies barbarous! Fie, sir! You might as well call bull-baiting barbarous.'

No one wanted to encourage highway robbers, yet none but this merchant from foreign parts would allow that an Englishman,

however wicked, should cruelly have his limbs broken and crushed by a rod of iron.

'As for the gentlemen of the road,' said Mrs. Gambit, 'I, for one, fear them not. They may take the butter and eggs in my basket, but they won't find my money, for that is in my shoe.'

'Nor mine,' said I, taking courage and thinking to show my cleverness; 'for it is all sewn safe inside my petticoats.'

'Hush, silly women!' cried the merchant. 'You know not but there is a highwayman sitting in disguise on the coach beside you. I beg pardon, sir,' he turned to the clergyman beside me—'no offence, sir—though I have heard of a thief who robbed a coach after travelling in it dressed as a gentleman of your cloth.'

'None, sir, none,' replied his reverence. 'Yet am I not a highwayman, I do assure you for your comfort. Nor have I any money in my pocket or my shoe. I am but a simple clergyman, going to look at a benefice which hath been graciously bestowed upon me.'

'That, sir,' said the merchant, 'is satisfactory, and I hope that no other ears have heard

what these ladies have disclosed. Shoes? petticoats? Oh, the things that I have seen and heard!'

The clergyman then told us that he had a wife and six daughters, and that the preferment (two hundred pounds a year!) would make a man of him, who had as yet been little better than a slave with sixty pounds for all his income. The Christian year, he told us, was a long Lent for him, save that sometimes, as at Christmas and Easter-tide, he was able to taste meat given to him. Yet he looked fat and hearty.

'My drink,' he said, 'is from the spring, which costs nothing; and my bread is but oatmeal-porridge, potatoes, or barley-meal.'

Then he pressed my hand in his, said I resembled his wife in her younger days, and declared that he already felt to me like a father.

There sat next to the merchant a young gentleman of about seventeen or eighteen, brave in scarlet, for he had just received a commission as ensign in a regiment of the line, and was on his way to join his colours, as he told us with pride. Directly highway robbers were mentioned he as-

sumed, being a young man with rosy and blushing cheek, fitter for a game of cricket on the green than for war's alarms, a fierce and warlike mien, and assured us that we ladies should not want protection while he was on the coach. And he made a great show of loosening his sword in the scabbard to ensure its quick and ready use, should the occasion rise. The merchant received these professions of courage with undisguised contempt; the clergyman smiled; Mrs. Gambit nodded her head and laughed, as if he was a boy whose talk meant nothing. I neither laughed at him nor scowled at him. In fact I was thinking, girl-like, what a handsome boy he was, and hoping that he would some day become a great general. As the country seems at the present juncture sadly in want of great generals, I fear he has been killed in action.

When we stopped for dinner, at one o'clock—I remember that I never before saw so prodigious a piece of roast beef upon the table—our host must needs spoil all enjoyment of the meal by asking us, just as we were sat down, sharp-set by the air, if we

had met or seen anything of a certain 'Black Will,' who seemed to be very well known by all. The very name caused our poor merchant to push back his plate untasted, and the young officer to rise from the table and hasten to assure himself that his sword was loose in the scabbard.

'Because,' said the landlord, 'it is right for you to know that Black Will is reported in this neighbourhood with all his crew: a bloody lot, gentlemen. I hope you have no valuables to speak of upon you. However, perhaps they will not meet you on the road. They murdered a man last year, a young gentleman like you, sir,' nodding to the ensign, 'because he offered resistance and drew his sword. What is a little toothpick like that, compared with a quarter-staff in the hands of a sturdy rogue? So they beat his brains out for him. Then they gagged and used most unmercifully, kicking him till he was senseless, an honest gentleman like yourself, sir'—he nodded to our merchant—'who gave them the trouble of taking off his boots, where, for greater safety, as the poor wretch thought, he had bestowed his money——'

'God bless my soul!' cried the merchant, changing colour so that I for one felt quite certain that his was there too, and that his courage was down in his boots as well, to keep the money company. 'Bless my soul! hanging, mere hanging, is too good for such villains.'

'It is indeed,' replied the landlord, shaking his head. 'There was a young lady, too'—I started, because he looked at me—'who had her money sewn in a bag inside her frock.' I blushed red, knowing where mine was. 'They made her take it off and dance a minuet with one of them in her petticoats. But indeed there is no end to their wickedness. Come, gentlemen, let me carve faster; spare not the beef; don't let Black Will spoil your appetites. Cut and come again. He may be twenty miles away. A noble sirloin, upon my word! To be sure, he may be waiting on the hill there in the wood.'

'A glass of brandy, landlord,' cried the merchant, who surely was a dreadful coward. 'Tell me, would he be alone?'

'Not likely.' The landlord, I thought, took a pleasure in making us uneasy. 'He would

have two or three with him. Perhaps six. With pistols. Do take some more beef. And blunderbusses. Ah! a desperate wicked gang.'

In such cheerful discourse we took our dinner, and then, with trepidation, mounted to our places and drove away.

We got up the hill safely, and met no Black Will. During the next stage we all kept an anxious look up and down the road. The coach seemed to crawl, and the way was rough. The sight of a man on horseback made our hearts beat; if we saw two, we gave ourselves up for lost. But I was pleased all the time to mark the gallant and resolute behaviour of the boy, who, with his hand upon the hilt of his sword, sat pale but determined; and when he caught my eye, smiled with the courage of one who would defend us to the death, as I am sure he would, like the gallant young knight he was.

Towards the evening we caught sight of the tower of Canterbury Cathedral, and soon afterwards we rolled through the streets of that ancient city, and got down at the Crown Inn, where we were to rest for the night.

I pass over, as unworthy of record, my own wonder at so great and beautiful a city. This was the first town I had ever seen; these the first shops; and this the first, and still the grandest, to my mind, of great cathedral churches. We walked through the great church at sunset, where there was something truly awful in the lofty arches mounting heavenwards, and the gloom of the roof. Outside there were Gothic ruins; rooks were calling to each other in the trees, and swifts were flying about the tower.

At supper we had more talk about highway robbers, but we were assured that there was less danger now, because between Canterbury and London the road is more frequented, and therefore robbers, who are by nature a timorous folk, hesitate to attack a coach. Moreover, the landlord told us that we should have with us two or three honest citizens of Canterbury, substantial tradesmen, who travelled to London together for mutual protection, taking money with them, and pistols with which to defend themselves.

'One of them,' he added, 'is a lieutenant in the train-band, and a draper in the city: a

more resolute fellow never handled a yard-measure.'

The gentlemen ordered a bowl of punch after supper, and we retired. As we left the room, the clergyman followed us. Outside the door, Mrs. Gambit having already begun to go upstairs, he said he would give me his benediction, which he did, kissing me on the cheeks and lips with much (and undeserved) affection. He was good enough to say that I greatly resembled his youngest sister, the beautiful one, and he desired closer acquaintance. Nor could I understand why Mrs. Gambit spoke scornfully of this act of kindness, which was entirely unexpected by me. 'Kindness, quotha!' she cried. 'A pious man indeed, to love to kiss a pretty maid I like not such piety.'

In the morning the train-band lieutenant, with his two friends, came swaggering to the inn. He carried his pistols openly, and made more display of them, I thought, than was necessary, considering his character for resolution and desperate bravery. Then we started, our little soldier still ready with his sword.

The road was smoother; it ran for the most part along enclosures and gentlemen's parks. It was broad and straight, having been made, we were told by the draper, in the time of the Romans; and as we drew nearer to London, the villages became more frequent, and the road was covered with carts, waggons, and carriages of every kind, all moving towards London. Was London bigger than Canterbury? I asked. They laughed at my innocence, and began to tell me that you might take the whole of Canterbury out of London and not miss it much: also that he or she who had not seen London had not seen the greatest marvel and wonder of the world.

'There are fine buildings,' said the merchant, 'in Paris, though the streets are foul; but in London there are buildings as fine, with streets that are broader: and there is the trade. Aha!'—he smacked his lips—'Paris hath no trade. One has to see the ships in the Pool, and the Custom House, and the wharves, before one can understand how great and rich a city is London. And one should also—but that, young lady, you

cannot ever do, live as long as you will, being only a woman—feast at one of the great City Companies to understand how nobly they can use their wealth.'

We were still anxious about highwaymen, but our fears were greatly lessened by the presence of the brave draper of Canterbury. The clergyman kept up a flow of anecdotes, which showed strange acquaintance with the wickedness of the world, on highwaymen, footpads, robbers of all kinds, deceivers of strangers, and practisers on innocence. The merchant listened eagerly, and together they bemoaned the credulity of the ignorant, and the subtlety of the designing.

Our spirits grew higher as we neared the end of our journey. Now, indeed, there was but little fear. The coach travels from Canterbury to London in a single day; we should arrive before nightfall.

'Ha! ha!' said the merchant, rubbing his hands, 'we who travel encounter many dangers. In London one can go to bed without fearing to be murdered in your sleep, and walk abroad without looking to be brained and murderously treated for the

sake of a purse and a watch. There may be pickpockets, shoplifters, and such petty rogues: there may be footpads about St. Pancras or Lincoln's Inn Fields, but small villains all compared with these desperate rogues of highwaymen.'

'Desperate indeed,' said the clergyman. 'Dear sir, we should be grateful for our preservation.'

It was already past seven when we arrived at the Talbot Inn. The merchant fetched a deep sigh, and thanked Providence aloud for keeping us safe from the danger of 'Stand and deliver!' The clergyman said, 'Amen,' but gently reproved the merchant for not allowing him, as an ordained minister, to take the lead in every devotional exercise. When they got down they entered the house together. The young ensign pulled off his hat to me, and said that no doubt the rogues had got wind of an officer's presence on the stage. Then he tapped his sword-hilt significantly, and got down, and I saw him no more. The gallant draper, getting down slowly, lamented that he must still be carrying loaded pistols, with never an opportunity for using them

upon the road, and uncocked his weapons with as much ostentatious care as he had shown in loading them. For my own part, I had no taste for fighting, or for seeing fights, and was only too glad to escape the hands of men who, if tales were true, did not even respect a girl's frocks. The clergyman bestowed a final benediction upon me, saying that he craved my name with a view to a closer friendship; and would have kissed me again had not Mrs. Gambit pushed him away with great roughness.

The thing I am now about to relate will doubtless seem incredible. Yet it is true. I learned it some time after, when Black Will was hanged, and his last Dying Speech and Confession was cried in the streets.

The merchant and the clergyman entered the Talbot Inn to drink together a bowl of punch at the former's expense. Before separating, the latter, out of respect for his cloth, called for a private room, whither the punch was presently brought.

Now, when they had taken a glass or two each, both being very merry, they were disturbed by the entrance of three tall and ill-

favoured fellows, who walked into the room and sat down, one on each side of the merchant.

'Gentlemen!' he cried, 'this is a private room, ordered by his reverence here and myself for the peaceful drinking of a thanksgiving glass.'

'No,' replied the clergyman, rising and locking the door; 'I find, dear sir, that this room had been already bespoke by these gentlemen, who are friends of mine own, and that we have very urgent business which particularly concerns yourself.'

At these words the merchant turned pale, being, as you may imagine, horribly frightened, and perceiving that he had fallen into a nest of hornets. Whereupon he sprang to his feet, and would have rushed to the door, but that two of the villains seized him and pushed him back into the chair, while the third drew a knife and held it at his throat, informing him that his weasand would most certainly be cut across did he but move a finger or utter a sigh. At this dreadful threat the poor man gave himself up for lost, and said no more, only the tears

of despair rolled down his face as he thought of what was going to happen to him.

The good clergyman then, with smiles and a polite bow, informed him that in this world things are not always what they seemed to be. 'Honest tradesmen,' he said, 'often turn out to be common cheats, and substantial citizens become bankrupts. Therefore, it is not surprising if a reverend minister of the Established Church should occasionally bear a hand in a little scheme in which good acting and dexterity are essentials necessary for success. In fact,' he went on, drinking up all the punch meanwhile, 'though to you and to many good friends I am a pious divine, among my particular intimates and these gentlemen of the road'—here he pointed to the three villains—'I am no other than Black Will, at your service! Nay, do not faint, dear sir. Although you would break me on the wheel, had you the power, I assure you I shall do you no harm in the world. Wherefore, kick off your boots!'

Alas! in his boots was the money which the poor man was bringing home from France. They took it all. They tied him to

his chair, and that to the table. They gagged him; they put his wig on the table, tied a handkerchief over his head, so that he should seem to be asleep; and then they left him, telling the waiter that the gentleman in the blue room was tired after his journey, and would like to be undisturbed for an hour or two.

To think that this villain (who was but twenty-four when he was hanged, a year or so later) should dare to feel towards me like a father, and to give me his blessing—on the lips!

CHAPTER IV.

HOW KITTY FIRST SAW THE DOCTOR.

It was past seven in the evening when we arrived at the Talbot Inn of Southwark, and too late to begin our search after my uncle that evening. Mrs. Gambit, therefore, after conference with a young man of eight-and-twenty or so, dressed in broadcloth, very kindly offered me a bed at her own lodging for the night. This, she told me, was in a quiet and most respectable neighbourhood, viz., Fore Street, which she begged me not to confound with Houndsditch. I readily assured her that I would preserve separate the ideas of the two streets, which was easy to one who knew neither.

She then informed me that the young man was no other than her husband, foreman of

works to a builder, and that, to save the expense of a porter, he would himself carry my box. Mr. Gambit upon this touched his hat respectfully, grinned, shouldered the box, and led the way, pushing through the crowd around us, and elbowing them to right and left without a word of excuse, as if they were so many ninepins.

I learned afterwards that it is customary with the mechanical tradesmen of London thus to assert their right of passage, and as it is not everyone who gives way, the porter's burden is not unfrequently lowered while he stops to fight one who disputes his path. In evidence of these street fights, most of the London carters, coachmen, chairmen, porters, and labourers, bear continually upon their faces the scars, recent or ancient, of many such encounters. As for the gentlemen, it seems right that they should not disdain to strip and take a turn with their fists against some burly ruffian who would thrust his unmannerly body past his betters, confident in his superior strength.

Mr. Gambit looked round from time to time to see if we were following, and it gave

me pain to observe how my box, which was long in shape, became the constant cause of sad accidents; for with it Mr. Gambit either knocked off a hat, or deranged a wig, or struck violently some peaceful person on the back of his head, or gave an inoffensive citizen a black eye, or caused profane passengers to swear. He was, however, so big, strong, and careless about these reproaches, that no one cared to stop him or offered to fight him until he was well on ahead.

'It's a royal supper,' he turned and nodded pleasantly, shouting these words to his wife; the box thus brought at right angles to the road, barred the way while he spoke, except to the very short. 'Tripe—fried tripe!—with onions and carrots and potatoes. Will be done to a turn at eight. Make haste!'

What crowds! what rushing to and fro! what jostling, pushing, and crowding! What hurrying, and what wicked language! Sure something dreadful must have happened, nor could I believe Mrs. Gambit when she assured me that this was the usual crowd of London.

Then we came to London Bridge: and I

saw the ships in the river and the Tower of London. Oh, the forests of masts! And, beyond the river, the steeples of the great city shining bright in the evening sunshine. Which of them was my uncle's church?

We crossed the bridge; we walked up Gracechurch Street to Cornhill; we passed through a labyrinth of narrow and winding lanes, crowded like the wider streets. Mr. Gambit hurried along, thinking, I suppose, of his supper, and using my box as a kind of battering-ram with which to force a way. Presently we came to a broad street, which was, in fact, Fore Street, where was Mrs. Gambit's lodging.

'Eight o'clock,' said Mr. Gambit, as we reached the top of the stairs. 'Now for supper.'

There was such a noise in the street below that we could hardly hear the church bells as they struck the hour. Yet there were churches all round us. But their bells clanging together only added somewhat to the general tumult.

'Eight o'clock, wife—good time!'

He dropped my box upon the floor, and hastened down the stairs.

It was a comfortable lodging of two rooms, in one of which a cloth was laid for supper, which Mr. Gambit speedily brought from a cook-shop, and we had a royal supper indeed, with two quarts at least of the nauseous black beer of London, to which such men are extravagantly addicted.

Supper ended, Mr. Gambit lit a pipe of tobacco and began to smoke, begging me not to mind him. His wife told him of the farm and her brother, and I tried to listen through the dreadful noise of the street below. It was a warm evening, and our window was thrown open; people were passing up and down, talking, singing, whistling, shouting, and swearing. I could hear nothing else; but the good man seemed as if he was deaf to the roar of the street, and listened to his wife as quietly as if we were in the fields. I asked him presently, with a shout, what was the cause of the dreadful riot and tumult? He laughed, and said that it was always the same. It was a pity, I said, that London, being so rich, could not keep the streets quiet.

'Ay, but,' said he, 'there are plenty of

poor people as well, and you must first ask what they think about having their mouths shut.'

The strangeness of the place and the noise in the streets kept me awake nearly all that night, so that, when Mrs. Gambit called me in the morning, I was still tired. But it was time to be up and seeking for my uncle.

We got everything ready: my father's last will and testament; my bags of money, which Mrs. Gambit carried for me in her basket, and tied the basket to her arm; and my box of clothes. Then, because Mrs. Gambit said that a young lady should not walk with her box carried by a porter, like a servant wench, we hired a coach and told him to drive us to St. Paul's Coffee House.

It is not far from Fore Street to St. Paul's Churchyard, but the crowd in the streets, the waggons and carts, and the dreadful practice of London drivers to quarrel and then to stop while they abuse each other, delayed us a great deal, so that it was already half-past nine when we came to the Coffee House.

We got down, leaving the coach at the door. It was a place the like of which I had

never dreamed of. To be sure, everything was new to me just then, and my poor rustic brain was turning with the novelty. There was a long room which smelt of tobacco, rum-punch, coffee, chocolate, and tea; it was already filled with gentlemen, sitting on the benches before small tables, at which some were taking pipes of tobacco, some were talking, some were writing, and some were reading the newspapers. Running along one side of the room was a counter covered with coffee-pots, bottles of Nantz, Jamaica rum, Hollands, and Geneva; there were also chocolate-dishes, sugar, lemons, spices, and punch-bowls. Behind the counter sat a young woman, of grave aspect, knitting, but holding herself in readiness to serve the customers.

The gentlemen raised their heads and stared at me; some of them whispered and laughed; all gazed as if a woman had no more business there than in the inner precincts of the Temple. That was what occurred to me instantly, because they were, I observed, all of them clergymen.

They were not, certainly, clergymen who

appeared to have risen in the world, nor did their appearance speak so much in their favour as their calling. They were mostly, in fact, clad in tattered gowns, with disordered or shabby wigs, and bands whose whiteness might have been restored by the laundress, but had changed long since into a crumpled yellow. I heard afterwards that the house was the resort of those 'tattered crapes,' as they are irreverently called, who come to be hired by the rectors, vicars, and beneficed clergy of London, for an occasional sermon, burial, or christening, and have no regular cure of souls.

On such chance employment and odd jobs these reverend ministers contrive to live. They even vie with each other and underbid their neighbours for such work; and some, who have not the means to spend a sixpence at the Coffee House, will, it is said, walk up and down the street, ready to catch a customer outside. One fears that there must be other reasons besides lack of interest for the ill success of these men. Surely, a godly life and zeal for religion should be, even in this country of patronage, better rewarded than

by this old age of penury and dependence. Surely, too, those tattered gowns speak a tale of improvidence, and those red noses tell of a mistaken calling.

This, however, I did not then know, and I naturally thought there must be some great ecclesiastical function in preparation, a confirming on a large scale, about to be celebrated in the great cathedral close beside, whose vastness was such as amazed and confounded me. These clergymen, whose poverty was no doubt dignified by their virtues, were probably preparing for the sacred function after the manner practised by my father, namely, by an hour's meditation. Perhaps my uncle would be among them.

Seeing me standing there helpless, and I dare say showing, by my face, what I immediately manifested in speech, my rusticity, the young woman behind the counter came to my assistance, and asked me, very civilly, what I lacked.

'I was told,' I stammered, 'to inquire at the St. Paul's Coffee House for the present lodging of my uncle.' As if there was but one uncle in all London!

'Certainly, madam,' said the woman, 'if you will tell me your uncle's name.'

'I was told that you knew, at this house, the residence of every London clergyman.'

'Yes, madam, that is true; and of a good many country clergymen. If you will let me know his name, we will do what we can to assist you.'

'He is named' (I said this with a little pride, because I thought that perhaps, from my own rusticity and the homeliness of my companion, she might not have thought me so highly connected), 'he is the Reverend Gregory Shovel, Doctor of Divinity.'

'Lord save us!' she cried, starting back and holding up her hands, while she dropped her knitting-needle. Why did she stare, smile, and then look upon me with a sort of pity and wonder? 'Dr. Shovel is your uncle, madam?'

'Yes,' I said. 'My father, who was also a clergyman, and is but lately dead, bade me come to London and seek him out.'

She shook her head at this news, and called for one William. There came from the other end of the room a short-legged man, with the

palest cheeks and the reddest nose I had ever seen. They spoke together for a few minutes. William grinned as she spoke, and scratched his head, under the scantiest wig I had ever seen.

'Can you tell me?' I began, when she returned. I observed that William, when he left her, ran quickly up the room, whispering to the gentlemen, who had ceased to stare at me, and that, as soon as he had whispered, they all, with one consent, put down their pipes, or their papers, or their coffee, stayed their conversation, and turned their clerical faces to gaze upon me, with a universal grin, which seemed ill-bred, if one might so speak of the clergy. 'Can you tell me?'

'I can, madam; and will,' she replied. 'What, did your father not know the present residence of Dr. Shovel? I fear it will not be quite such as a young lady of your breeding, madam, had a right to expect. But doubtless you have other and better friends.'

'She has indeed,' said Mrs. Gambit, 'if his honour Sir Robert Levett, Justice of the Peace, is to be called a good friend. But, if you please, tell us quickly, madam, because

our coach waits at the door, and waiting is money in London. The country for me, where a man will sit on a stile the whole day long, and do nothing, content with his daily wage. And the sooner we get away from these reverend gentlemen, who stare as if they had never seen a young lady from the country before, the better.'

'Then,' the young woman went on, 'tell your man to drive you down Ludgate Hill and up the Fleet Market on the prison side; he may stop at the next house to the third Pen and Hand. You will find the doctor's name written on a card in the window.'

We thanked her, and got into the coach. When we told the coachman where to go, he smacked his leg with his hand, and burst out laughing.

'I thought as much,' cried the impudent rascal. 'Ah, Mother Slylips! wouldn't the doctor serve your turn, but you must needs look out for one in the Coffee House? I warrant the doctor is good enough for the likes of you!'

He cracked his whip, and we drove off slowly.

Now, which was really extraordinary, all the reverend gentlemen of the coffee-room had left their places and were crowded round the door, some of them almost pushing their wigs into the coach windows in their eagerness to look at us. This seemed most unseemly conduct on the part of a collection of divines; nor did I imagine that curiosity so undignified, and so unworthy a sacred profession, could be called forth by the simple appearance of a young girl in the coffee-room.

The faces formed a curious picture. Some of the clergymen were stooping, some standing, some mounting on chairs, the better to see, so that the doorway of the Coffee House seemed a pyramid of faces. They were old, young, fat, thin, red, pale, of every appearance and every age; they were mostly disagreeable to look at, because their possessors were men who had been unsuccessful, either through misfortune or through fault; and they all wore, as they stared, a look of delighted curiosity, as if here was something, indeed, to make Londoners talk—nothing less, if you please, than a girl of seventeen, just come up from the country.

'Bless us!' cried Mrs. Gambit, 'are the men gone mad? London is a wicked place indeed, when even clergymen come trooping out merely to see a pretty girl! Fie for shame, sir, and be off with you!'

These last words were addressed to one old clergyman with an immense wig, who was actually thrusting his face through the coach window. He drew it back, on this reprimand, and we went on our way.

I looked round once more. The young woman of the counter was still in the doorway, and with her William, with the scrubby wig and the red nose; round them were the clergymen, and they were all talking about me, and looking after me. Some of them wagged their heads, some shook theirs, some nodded, some were holding their heads on one side, and some were hanging theirs. Some were laughing, some smiling, some were grave. What did it mean?

'If,' said Mrs. Gambit, 'they were not clergymen, I should say they were all tomfools. And this for a pretty girl—for you are pretty, Miss Kitty, with your rosy cheeks and the bright eyes which were never yet

spoiled by the London smoke. But there must be plenty other pretty girls in London. And them to call themselves clergymen!'

'Perhaps they were looking at you, Mrs. Gambit.'

The idea did not seem to displease her. She smiled, smoothed the folds of her gown, and pulled down the ends of her neckerchief.

'Five years ago, child, they might. But I doubt it is too late. Set them up, indeed! As if nothing would suit them to look at but the wife of a respectable builder's foreman. They must go into the country, must they, after the pretty faces?'

But oh, the noise and tumult of the streets! For as we came to the west front of St. Paul's, we found Ludgate Hill crowded with such a throng as I had never before believed possible. The chairmen jostled each other up and down the way. The carts, coaches, drays, barrows, waggons, trucks, going up the hill, met those going down, and there was such a crush of carriages, as, it seemed, would never be cleared. All the drivers were swearing at each other at the top of their voices.

'Shut your ears, child!' cried Mrs. Gambit. But, immediately afterwards: 'There! it's no use; they could be heard through my grandfather's nightcap! Oh, this London wickedness!'

There are many kinds of wickedness in London; but the worst, as I have always thought, because I have seen and heard so much of it, is the great and terrible vice of blasphemy and profane swearing, so that, if you listen to the ragamuffin boys or to the porters, or to the chair and coachmen, it would seem as if it were impossible for them to utter three words without two, at least, being part of an oath.

Then some of the drivers fought with each other; the people in the coaches looked out of the windows—swore, if they were men; if they were ladies, they shrieked. Most of those who were walking up and down the hill took no manner of notice of the confusion; they pushed on their way, bearing parcels and bundles, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but straight in front, as if they had not a moment to spare, and must push on or lose their chance of fortune. Some

there were, it is true, who lingered, looking at the crush in the road and the men fighting; or, if they were women, stopping before the shops, in the windows of which were hoods, cardinals, sashes, pinners, and shawls, would make the mouth of any girl to water only to look at them. At the doors stood shopmen, bravely habited in full-dressed wigs with broad ribbon ties behind, who bowed and invited the gazers to enter. And there were a few who loitered as they went. These carried their hats beneath their arms, and dangled canes in their right hands.

There was plenty of time for us to notice all that passed, because the block in the way took fully half an hour to clear away. We were delayed ten minutes of this time through the obstinacy of a drayman, who, after exchanging with a carter oaths which clashed, and clanged, and echoed in the air like the bombshells at the siege of Mans, declared that he could not possibly go away satisfied until he had fought his man. The mob willingly met his views, applauding so delicate a sense of honour. They made a ring, and we presently heard the shouts of those who encouraged the combatants, but

happily could not see them, by reason of the press. Mrs. Gambit would fain have witnessed the fight; and, indeed, few country people there are who do not love to see two sturdy fellows thwack and belabour each other with quarter-staff, single-stick, or fists. But I was glad that we could not see the battle, being, I hope, better taught. My father, indeed, and Lady Levett, were agreed that in these things we English were little better than the poor pagan Romans, who crowded to see gladiators do battle to the death, or prisoners fight till they fell, cruelly torn and mangled by the lions; and no better at all than the poor Spanish papists who flock to a circus where men fight with bulls. It is hard to think that Roman gentlewomen and Spanish ladies would go to see such sights, whatever men may do. Yet in this eighteenth century, when we have left behind us, as we flatter ourselves, the Gothic barbarisms of our ancestors, we still run after such cruelties and cruel sports as fights with fists, sticks, or swords, baitings of bull, bear, and badger, throwing stones at cocks, killing of rats by dogs and ferrets, fights of cocks, dogs, cats, and whatever other animals

can be persuaded to fight and kill each other.

When the fight was over, and one man defeated—I know not which, but both were horribly bruised and stained with blood—the carts cleared away rapidly, and we were able to go on. Is it not strange to think that the honour of such a common fellow should be 'satisfied' when he hath gotten black eyes, bloody nose, and teeth knocked down his throat?

We got to the bottom of the hill, and passed without further adventure through the old gate of Lud, with its narrow arch and the stately effigy of Queen Elizabeth looking across the Fleet Bridge. Pity it is that the old gate has since been removed. For my own part, I think the monuments of old times should be carefully guarded and kept, not taken away to suit the convenience of draymen and coaches. What would Fleet Street be without its bar? or the Thames without its river-gates? Outside, there was a broad space before us. The Fleet river ran, filthy and muddy, to the left, the road crossing it by a broad and handsome stone bridge, where

the way was impeded by the stalls of those who sold hot furmety and medicines warranted to cure every disease. On the right, the Fleet had been recently covered in, and was now built over with a long row of booths and stalls. On either side the market were rows of houses.

'Fleet Market,' said the driver, looking round. 'Patience, young lady. Five minutes, and we are there.'

There was another delay here of two or three minutes. The crowd was denser, and I saw among them two or three men with eager faces, who wore white aprons, and ran about whispering in the ears of people, especially of young people. I saw one couple, a young man and a girl, whom they all, one after the other, addressed, whispering, pointing, and inviting. The girl blushed and turned away her head, and the young man, though he marched on stoutly, seemed not ill pleased with their proposals. Presently one of them came to our coach and put his head in at the window. It was as impudent and ugly a head as ever I saw. He squinted, one eye rolling about by itself, as if having

quarrelled with the other; he had had the bridge of his nose crushed in some fight; some of his teeth stuck out like fangs, but most were broken; his chin was bristly with a three days' beard; his voice was thick and hoarse; and when he began to speak, his hearers began to think of rum.

'Pity it is,' he said, 'that so pretty a pair cannot find gallant husbands. Now, ladies, if you will come with me I warrant that in half an hour the doctor will bestow you upon a couple of the young noblemen whom he most always keeps in readiness.'

Here the driver roughly bade him begone about his business for an ass, for the young lady was on her way to the doctor's. At this the fellow laughed and nodded his head.

'Aha!' he said, 'no doubt we shall find the gentleman waiting. Your ladyship will remember that I spoke to you first. The fees of us messengers are but half-a-crown, even at the doctor's, where alone the work is secure.'

'What means the fellow?' cried Mrs. Gambit. 'What have we to do with gentlemen?'

'All right, mother,' he replied, with another laugh. Then he mounted the door-

step, and continued to talk while the coach slowly made its way.

We were now driving along the city side of the Fleet Market, that side on which stands the prison. The market was crowded with buyers and sellers, the smell of the meat, the poultry, and the fruit, all together, being strong rather than delicate.

'This,' said Mrs. Gambit, 'is not quite like the smell of the honeysuckle in the Kentish hedges.'

The houses on our right seemed to consist of nothing but taverns, where signs were hoisted up before the doors. At the corner, close to the ditch, was the Rainbow, and four doors higher up was the Hand and Pen, next to that the Bull and Garter, then another Hand and Pen, then the Bishop Blaize, a third Hand and Pen, the Fighting Cocks, and the Naked Boy. One called the White Horse had a verse written up under the sign :

'My White Horse shall beat the Bear,
And make the Angel fly ;
Turn the Ship with its bottom up ;
And drink the Three Cups dry.'

But what was more remarkable was that of the repetition in every window of a singular

announcement. Two hands were painted, or drawn rudely, clasping each other, and below them was written, printed, or scrawled, some such remarkable legend as the following :

'Weddings Performed Here.'
'A Church of England Clergyman always on the Premises.'
'Weddings performed Cheap.'
'The Only Safe House.'
'The Old and True Register.'
'Marriage by Church Service and Ordained Clergymen.'
'Safety and Cheapness.'
'The Licensed Clergyman of the Fleet.'
'Weddings by a late Chaplain to a Nobleman—one familiar with the Quality.'
'No Imposition.'
'Not a Common Fleet Parson ;'

with other statements which puzzled me exceedingly.

'You do well, ladies,' the man with us went on, talking with his head thrust into the coach, 'you do well to come to Doctor Shovel, whose humble servant, or clerk, I am. The doctor is no ordinary Fleet parson. He does not belong to the beggarly gentry—not regular clergymen at all—who live in a tavern, and do odd jobs as they come, for a guinea a week and the run of the landlord's

rum. Not he, madam. The doctor is a gentleman and a scholar : Master of Arts of the University of Cambridge he was, where, by reason of their great respect for his learning and piety, they have made him Doctor of Divinity. There is the Rev. Mr. Arkwell, who will read the service for you for half-a-crown ; he was fined five shillings last week for drunkenness and profane swearing. Would it be agreeable to your ladyship to be turned off by such an impious rogue ? There is the Rev. Mr. Wigmore will do it for less, if you promise to lay out your wedding money afterwards on what he calls his Nantz : he hath twice been fined for selling spirituous drinks without a license. Who would trust herself to a man so regardless of his profession ? Or the Rev. John Mottram—but there, your ladyship would not like to have it read in a prison. Now, at the doctor's is a snug room with hassocks. There is, forsooth, the Rev. Walter Wyatt, brother of him who keeps the first Pen and Hand after you turn the corner ; but sure, such a sweet young lady would scorn to look for drink after the service ; or the Rev. John Grierson, or Mr. Walker, or Mr. Alex-

ander Keith, will do it for what they can get, ay! even—it is reported—down to eighteenpence or a shilling, with a sixpennyworth of Geneva. But your ladyship must think of your lines; and where is your security against treachery? No, ladies. The doctor is the only man; a gentleman enjoying the liberties of the Fleet, for which he hath given security; a Cambridge scholar; who receives at his lodging none but the quality: no less a fee than a guinea, with half-a-crown for the clerk, ever enters his house. The guinea, ladies, includes the five-shilling stamp, with the blessing of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which binds the happy pair like an act of parliament or a piece of cobbler's wax. This cheapness is certainly due to the benevolence and piety of the doctor, who would be loth indeed to place obstacles in the way of so Christian and religious a ceremony.'

'We have certainly,' cried Mrs. Gambit, in dismay at such a flow of words, 'got into Tom Fool's Land. This man is worse than the parsons at the Coffee House.'

'Now, ladies,' the fellow went on, throwing the door wide open with a fling, and letting

down the steps, 'this is the house. Look at it, ladies!'

We got down and stood looking at it.

It was a low house of mean appearance, built in two stories of brick and timber, the first floor overhanging the lower, as was the fashion until the present comfortable and handsome mode of using stucco and flat front was adopted. The brick had been once covered with a coat of yellow wash, which had crumbled away over most of the front; the timber had once been painted, but the paint had fallen off. The roof was gabled; like the rest of the house, it looked decaying and neglected. The window of the room which looked out upon the street was broad, but it was set with leaden frames of the kind called diamond, provided with the common greenish glass; every other pane being those thick bullseye panes, which would stand a blow with a club without being broken. Little light would enter at that window but for the bright sun which shone full upon it; the casement, however, was set open to catch the air.

As for the air, that was hardly worth

catching, so foul was it with the fumes of the market. Right in front of the door stood a great heap of cabbage leaves, stalks, and vegetable refuse, which sometimes was collected, put in barrows and carted into the Fleet Ditch, but sometimes remained for months.

Mrs. Gambitt sniffed disdainfully.

'Give me Fore Street,' she said. 'There's noise, if you like, but no cabbage-stalks.'

'This, ladies,' said the man after a pause, so that we might be overpowered with the grandeur of the house; 'this is no other than the great Dr. Shovel's house. Here shall you find a service as regular and as truly read as if you were in the cathedral itself. Not so much as an amen dropped. They do say that the doctor is a private friend of the dean, and hand-in-glove with the bishop. This way. Your ladyship's box? I will carry it. This is the good doctor's door. The clerk's fee half-a-crown; your ladyship will not forget, unless the young gentleman, which is most likely, should like to make it half-a-guinea. I follow your ladyships. Doubt not that, early as it is, his reverence will be found up and ready for good works.'

'I believe,' said Mrs. Gambit, 'that this man would talk the hind legs off a donkey. Keep close to me, Miss Kitty. Here may be villainy; and if there is, there's one at least that shall feel the weight of my ten nails. Young man,' she addressed the fellow with sharpness, 'you let that box alone, or if you carry it, go before; I trust Londoners as far as I can see them, and no farther.'

'Pray, ladies,' cried the man, 'have no suspicion.'

'It's all right,' said the coachman, grinning. 'Lord! I've brought them here by dozens. Go in, madam. Go in, young lady.'

'This way, ladies,' cried the man. 'The doctor will see you within.'

'A clergyman,' continued Mrs. Gambit, taking no manner of notice of these interruptions, 'may not always, no more than a builder's foreman, choose where he would live. And if his parish is the Fleet Market, among the cabbages, as I suppose the doctor's is, or about the Fleet Prison, among the miserable debtors, as I suppose it may be, why he must fain live here with the cabbage-stalks

beneath his nose and make the best of it.'

'Your ladyship,' the messenger went on, addressing himself to me, 'will shortly, no doubt, be made happy. The gentleman, however, hath not yet come. Pray step within, ladies.'

'You see, Miss Kitty,' said Mrs. Gambit, pointing to the window, with a disdainful look at this impertinent fellow, 'this is certainly the house. So far, therefore, we are safe.'

In the window there hung a card, on which was written in large characters, so that all might read :

REVEREND GREGORY SHOVEL,

DOCTOR OF DIVINITY.

FORMERLY OF CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY.

Now, without any reason, I immediately connected this announcement with those curious advertisements I had seen in the tavern windows. And yet, what could my uncle have to do with marrying? And what

did the man mean by his long rigmarole and nonsense about the Reverend This and the Reverend That ?

However, Mrs. Gambit led the way, and I followed.

The messenger pushed a door open, and we found ourselves in a low room lit by the broad window with the diamond panes of which I have spoken. The air in the room was close, and smelt of tobacco and rum : the floor was sanded : the wainscoting of the walls was broken in places ; walls, floors, and ceiling were all alike unwashed and dirty : the only furniture was a table, half-a-dozen cushions or hassocks, and one great chair with arms and back of carved wood. On the table was a large volume. It was the Prayer-book of the Established Church of England and Ireland, and it was lying open, I could plainly see, at the Marriage Service.

At the head of the table, a reflection of the sunlight from the window falling full upon his face, sat a man of middle-age, about fifty-five years or so, who rose when we came in, and bowed with great gravity. Could this be my uncle ?

He was a very big and stout man—one of the biggest men I have ever seen. He was clad in a rich silk gown, flowing loosely and freely about him, white bands, clean and freshly starched, and a very full wig. He had the reddest face possible: it was of a deep crimson colour, tinged with purple, and the colour extended even to the ears, and the neck—so much of it as could be seen—was as crimson as the cheeks. He had a full nose, long and broad, a nose of great strength and very deep in colour; but his eyes, which were large, reminded me of that verse in the Psalms, wherein the divine poet speaks of those whose eyes swell out with fatness; his lips were gross and protruded; he had a large square forehead and a great amplitude of cheek. He was broad in the shoulders, deep-chested and portly—a man of great presence; when he stood upright he not only seemed almost to touch the ceiling, but also to fill up the breadth of the room. My heart sank as I looked at him; for he was not the manner of man I expected, and I was afraid. Where were the outward signs and tokens of that piety which my father had led me to expect

in my uncle? I had looked for a gentle scholar, a grave and thoughtful bearing. But, even to my inexperienced eyes, the confident carriage of the doctor appeared braggart: the roll of his eyes when we entered the room could not be taken even by a simple country girl for the grave contemplation of a humble and fervent Christian: the smell of the room was inconsistent with the thought of religious meditation: there were no books or papers, or any other outward signs of scholarship; and even the presence of the Prayer-book on the table, with the hassocks, seemed a mockery of sacred things.

'So, good Roger,' he said in a voice loud and sonorous, yet musical as the great bell of St. Paul's, so deep was it and full—'So, good Roger, whom have we here?'

'A young lady, sir, whom I had the good fortune to meet on Ludgate Hill. She was on her way to your reverence's, to ask your good offices. She is—ahem!—fully acquainted with the customary fees of the Establishment.'

'That is well,' he replied. 'My dear young lady, I am fortunate in being the humble

instrument of making so sweet a creature happy. But I do not see . . . in fact . . . the other party.'

'The young lady expects the gentleman every minute,' said the excellent Roger.

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Gambit, 'the man is stark mad—staring mad!'

'Sir,' I faltered—'here is, I fear, some mistake.'

He waved both of his hands with a gesture reassuring and grand.

'No mistake, madam, at all. I am that Dr. Shovel before whom the smaller pretenders in these Liberties give place and hide diminished heads. If by any unlucky accident your lover has fallen a prey to some of those (self-styled) clerical gentry, who are in fact impostors and sharpers, we will speedily rescue him from their talons. Describe the gentleman, madam, and my messenger shall go and seek him at the Pen and Hand, or at some other notorious place.'

The clerk, meanwhile, had placed himself beside his master, and now produced a greasy Prayer-book, with the aid of which I suppose

he meant to give the responses of the Church. At the mention of the word 'mistake' a look of doubt and anxiety crossed his face.

'There is, indeed, some mistake, sir,' I repeated. 'My errand here is not of the kind you think.'

'Then, madam, your business with me must be strange indeed. Sirrah!' he addressed his clerk, in a voice of thunder, 'hast thou been playing the fool? What was it this young lady sought of you?'

'Oh, sir! this good person is not to blame, perhaps. Are you indeed the Rev. Gregory Shovel, Doctor of Divinity?'

'No other, madam.' He spread out both his arms, proudly lifting his gown, so that he really seemed to cover the whole end of the room. 'No other: I assure you I am Dr. Gregory Shovel, known and beloved by many a happy pair.'

'And the brother-in-law of the late Reverend Lawrence Pleydell, late vicar of ——'

He interrupted me. 'Late vicar? Is, then, my brother-in-law dead? or have they, which is a thing incredible, conferred preferment upon sheer piety?'

'Alas! sir,' I cried, with tears, 'my father is dead.'

'Thy father, child!'

'Yes, sir; I am Kitty Pleydell, at your service.'

'Kitty Pleydell!' He bent over me across the table, and looked into my face not unkindly. 'My sister's child! then how——' He turned upon his clerk, who now stood with staring eyes and open mouth, chap-fallen and terrified. 'Fool!' he thundered. 'Get thee packing, lest I do thee a mischief!'

CHAPTER V.

HOW KITTY WITNESSED A FLEET WEDDING.

Then I pulled out my father's letter, and gave it to him to read.

He took it, read it carefully, nodding gravely over each sentence, and then returned it to me.

'Lawrence, then,' he said softly, 'Lawrence is dead! Lawrence Pleydell is dead! And I am living. Lawrence! He hath, without reasonable doubt, passed away in full assurance. He hath exchanged this world for a better. He hath gone to happiness. Nay, if such as he die not in faith, what hope remains for such sinners as ourselves? Then would it be better for those who dwell in the Liberties of the Fleet if they had never been born. So. My sister's child. Hold up thy

face, my dear.' He kissed me as he spoke, and held his hand under my chin so that he could look at me well. 'There is more Pleydell than Shovel here. That is well, because the Pleydells are of gentle blood. And the daughter doth ever favour the father more than the mother. Favour him in thy life, child, as well as in thy features.

'Lawrence is dead!' he went on. 'The gentlest soul, the most pious and religious creature that the world has ever seen. He, for one, could think upon his Maker without the terror of a rebellious and prodigal son. The world and the flesh had no temptations for him. A good man, indeed. It is long since I saw him, and he knew not where I live, nor how. Yet he, who knew me when I was young, trusted still in me—whom no one else will trust. This it is to start in life with goodly promise of virtue, scholarship, and religion.'

He cleared his throat, and was silent awhile.

'Thy father did well, child. I will treat thee as my own daughter. Yet I know not, indeed, where to bestow thee, for this house

is not fit for girls, and I have none other. Still, I would fain take thy father's place, so far as in me lies. He, good man, lived in the country, where virtue, like fresh butter and new-laid eggs, flourishes easily and at the cost of a little husbandry in the way of prayer and meditation. As for us who live in great cities, and especially in the Rules or Liberties of the Fleet, we may say with the Psalmist, having examples to the contrary continually before us, with temptations such as dwellers in the fields wot not of, "He that keepeth the Law, happy is he!" I have neither wife nor child to greet thee, Kitty. I must bestow thee somewhere. What shall we do?'

He paused to think.

'I might find a lodging———but no, that would not do. Or in———but the house is full of men. There is the clerk of St. Sepulchre's, whose wife would take thee; but the rector bears me a heavy grudge. Ho! ho!' he laughed low down in his chest. 'There is not a parish round London, from Limehouse to Westminster, and from Southwark to Highgate, where the niece of Dr.

Shovel would not find herself flouted, out of the singular hatred which the clergy bear to me. For I undersell them all. And if they pass an Act to prevent my marrying, then will I bury for nothing and undersell them still. Well, I must take order in this matter. And who are you, my good woman?' He asked this of Mrs. Gambit.

'Jane Gambit, sir,' she replied, 'at your service, and the wife of Samuel Gambit, foreman of works. And my charge is not to leave Miss Kitty until she is safe in your reverence's hands. There are the hands, to be sure; but as for safety——' She paused, and sniffed violently, looking round the room with a meaning air.

'Why, woman, you would not think the child in danger with me?'

'I know not, sir. But Miss Kitty has been brought up among gentlefolk, and the room is not one to which she has been accustomed to live in, or to eat in, or to sleep in, either at the Vicarage or the Hall. Tobacco and the smell of rum may be very well—in their place, which, I humbly submit, is in a tavern, not a gentlewoman's parlour.'

'The woman speaks reason,' he growled, laying his great hand upon the table. 'See, my dear, my brother-in-law thought me holding a rich benefice in the Church. Those get rich benefices who have rich friends and patrons. I had none; therefore I hold no benefice. And as for my residence, why, truly, I have little choice except between this place and the Fleet Prison, or perhaps the King's Bench. Else might I welcome thee in a better and more convenient lodging. Know, therefore, Kitty, without any concealment, that I live here secluded in the Liberties of the Fleet in order that my creditors, of whom I have as many as most men and more importunate, may no longer molest me when I take my walks abroad; that I am in this place outside the authority of the bishop; and that my occupation is to marry, with all safety and despatch, without license, or asking of banns, or any of the usual delays, those good people who wish to be married secretly and quickly, and can afford at least one guinea fee for the ceremony.'

I stared in amazement. To be sure, every

clergyman can marry, but for a clergyman to do naught else seemed strange indeed.

He saw my amazement; and, drawing his tall and burly figure upright, he began to deliver an oration—I call it an oration, because he so puffed his cheeks, rolled his sentences, and swelled himself out while he spoke, that it was more like a sermon or oration than a mere speech. In it he seemed to be trying at once to justify himself in my eyes, to assert his own self-respect, and to magnify his office.

'It is not likely, child,' he said, 'that thou hast been told of these marriages in the Fleet. Know, therefore, that in this asylum, called the Rules of the Fleet, where debtors find some semblance of freedom and creditors cease to dun, there has grown up a custom of late years by which marriages are here rapidly performed (for the good of the country), which the beneficed clergy would not undertake without great expense, trouble, delay, and the vexation of getting parents' and guardians' consent, to say nothing of the prodigality and wasteful expense of feasting which

follows what is called a regular marriage. Therefore, finding myself some years ago comfortably settled in the place, after contracting a greater debt than is usually possible for an unbeneficed clergyman, I undertook this trade, which is lucrative, honourable, and easy. There are indeed,' he added, 'both in the Prison and the Rules, but more especially the latter, many Fleet parsons'—here he rolled his great head with complacency—'but none, my child, so great and celebrated as myself. Some, indeed, are mere common cheats, whose marriages—call them, rather, sacrilegious impostures—are not worth the paper of their pretended certificates. Some are perhaps what they profess to be, regularly ordained clergymen of the Church of England and Ireland as by law established, the supreme head of which is his gracious Majesty. But even these are tipplers, and beggars, and paupers—men who drink gin of an evening and small beer in the morning, whose gowns are as ragged as their reputations, and who take their fees in shillings, with a dram thrown in, and herd with the common offscourings of the town,

whom they marry. Illiterate, too: not a Greek verse or a Latin hexameter among them all. Go not into the company of such, lest thou be corrupted by their talk. In the words of King Lemuel: "Let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more."' Here he paused and adjusted his gown, as if he were in a pulpit. Indeed, for the moment, he imagined, perhaps, that he was preaching. 'As for me, Gregory Shovel, my marriages are what they pretend to be, as tight as any of the archbishop's own tying, conducted with due decorum by a member of the University of Cambridge, a man whose orders are beyond dispute, whose history is known to all, an approved and honoured scholar. Yes, my niece, behold in me one who has borne off University and College medals for Latin verse. My Latin verses, wherein I have been said to touch Horace, and even to excel Ovid, whether in the tender elegiac, the stately alcaic, the melting sapphic, or the easy-flowing hendecasyllabic loved of Martial, have conferred upon my head the bays of fame. Other Fleet parsons? Let them

hide their ignorant heads in their second-hand perruques! By the thunders of Jupiter!'—his powerful voice rose and rolled about the room like the thunder by which he swore—'By the thunders of Jupiter, I am their Bishop! Let them acknowledge that I, and I alone, am The Chaplain of the Fleet!'

During this speech he swelled himself out so enormously, and so flourished his long gown, that he seemed to fill the whole room. I shrank into a corner, and clasped Mrs. Gambit's hand.

This kind of terror I have always felt since, whenever, which is rare, I have heard a man speak in such a full, rich, manliness of voice. It was a voice with which he might have led thousands to follow him and do his bidding. When I read of any great orator at whose speeches the people went mad, so that they did what he told them were it but to rush along the road to certain death, I think of the Reverend Dr. Shovel. I am sure that Peter the Hermit, or St. Bernard, must have had such a voice. While he spoke, though the words were not noble, the air was

such, the voice was such, the eloquence was such, that my senses were carried away, and I felt that in the hands of such a man no one was master of himself. His demeanour was so majestic, that even the shabby, dirty room in which he spoke became for the time a temple fit for the sacred rites conducted by so great and good a man : the noise of carts, the voices of men and women, were drowned and stilled beneath the rolling music of his voice. I was rapt and astonished and terrified.

Mrs. Gambit was so far impressed when the doctor began this oration, that she instantly assumed that attitude of mind and body in which country people always listen to a sermon : that is to say, she stood with her chin up, her eyes fixed on the ceiling (fie ! how black it was !), her hands crossed, and her thoughts wandering freely whithersoever they listed. It is a practice which sometimes produces good effects, save when the preacher, which is seldom, hath in his own mind a clear message to deliver from the Revealed Word. For it prevents a congregation from discerning the poverty of the discourse; and in these latter days of Whit-

field, Wesley, and the sad schisms which daily we witness, it checks the progress of Dissent.

The doctor, after a short pause, swept back his flowing gown with a significant gesture of his left hand, and resumed the defence or apology for his profession. It was remarkable that he spoke as earnestly, and with as much force, eloquence, and justness in this address to two women—or to one and a half, because Mrs. Gambit, thinking herself in church, was only half a listener—as if he had been addressing a great congregation beneath the vast dome of St. Paul's. The doctor, I afterwards found, was always great; no mean or little ways were his: he lived, he spoke, he moved, he thought like a bishop. Had he been actually a bishop, I am sure that his stateliness, dignity, and pomp would have been worthy of that exalted position, and that he would have graced the bench by the exhibition of every Christian virtue, except perhaps that of meekness. For the doctor was never meek.

'Let us,' said the doctor, 'argue the question. What is there contrary to the Rubric

in my calling? The Church hath wisely ordered that marriage is a state to be entered upon only after sanctification by her ministers or priests; I am one of those ministers. She hath provided and strictly enjoined a rule of service; I read that service. She hath recommended the faithful to marry as if to enter a holy and blessed condition of life; I encourage and exhort the people to come to me with the design of obeying the Church and entering upon that condition. She hath, in deference to the laws of the land, required a stamped certificate (at five shillings); I find that certificate in obedience to the law. Further, for the credit of the cloth, and because people must not think the ministers of the Church to be, like common hackney coachmen, messengers, running lackeys, and such varlets, at the beck and call of every prentice boy and ragamuffin wench with a yard-measure and a dishclout for all their fortune; and because, further, it is well to remind people of thrift, especially this common people of London, who are grievously given to waste, prodigality, gluttony, fine clothes, drinking, and all such extravagances—Nay,

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how except by thrift will they find money to pay their lawful tithes to Mother Church ?—wherefore it is my custom—nay, my undeviating rule—to charge a fee of one guinea at least for every pair, with half-a-crown for the services of the clerk. More may be given ; more, I say, is generally given by those who have money in pocket, and generous, grateful hearts. What, indeed, is a present of ten guineas in return for such services as mine ? Child, know that I am a public benefactor ; behold in me one who promotes the happiness of his species ; but for me maids would languish, lovers groan, and cruel guardians triumph. I ask not if there be any impediment ; I inquire not if there be some to forbid the banns ; I do not concern myself with the lover's rent-roll ; I care not what his profession—I have even married a lady to her footman, since she desired it, and a nobleman to his cook, since that was his lordship's will. I ask not for consent of parents ; the maiden leaves my doors a wife : when she goes home, no parents or guardians can undo the knot that I have tied. Doctors, learned in theology, casuistry, science, and philosophy, have

been called by divers names; there have been the Subtle Doctor, the Golden Doctor, the Eloquent Doctor. For me there has been reserved the title of the Benevolent Doctor; of me let it be said that he loved even beyond his respect towards his diocesan, even beyond obedience to his ecclesiastical superiors, even beyond consideration to the parish clergy, who by his means were deprived of their fees, the happiness of his fellow men and women.'

His voice had dropped to the lower notes, and his last words were spoken in deep but gentle thunder. When he had finished, Mrs. Gambit dropped her chin and returned to practical business.

'And pray, sir, what will Miss Kitty do?'

Recalled to the facts of the case, the doctor paused. His cheeks retracted, his breadth and height became perceptibly smaller.

'What will she do? That is, indeed, a difficulty.'

'If,' said Mrs. Gambit, 'your honour is a prisoner——'

'Woman!' he roared, 'I enjoy the Liberties of the Fleet—the Liberties, do you hear?

Prate not to me of prisoners. Is Dr. Shovel a man, think ye, to clap in a prison?'

'Well, then, is Miss Kitty to live here?' She looked round in disgust. 'Why, what a place is this for a young lady virtuously and godly reared? Your ceiling is black with smoke; the windows are black with dirt; the walls are streaked with dirt; the floor is as thick with mud as the road—faugh! If your honour is a bishop, as you say you are, you can doubtless put the poor young lady, who is used to sweet air and clean floors, where she will get such—and that without profane swearing.'

The last remark was caused by language used at that moment outside the window by a man wheeling a barrow full of cabbages, which upset. While picking up the vegetables, he swore loudly, administering rebuke in a couple of oaths at least, and in some cases more, to every head of cabbage in turn, An unreflecting wretch indeed, to break a commandment upon a senseless vegetable!

'Nay,' I said, 'my uncle will do what is best for me.'

'I will do for thee,' he said, 'what I can.

This place is not fit for a young girl. All the morning it is wanted for my occupation. In the evening I am visited by gentlemen who seek me for certain merits, graces or beauties of conversation in which I am said (although I boast not) to be endowed with gifts beyond those allotted to most men. No, child, thou must not stay here.'

While we stood waiting for his decision, we became aware of a most dreadful noise outside. Men were shouting, women were screaming; of course bad language and cursing formed a large part of what was said. The air about the Fleet was always heavy with oaths, so that at last the ear grew accustomed to them, and we noticed them no more than in the quiet fields one notices the buzzing of the insects. But these people, whoever they were, congregated outside the door of the house; and after more oaths and loud talk, the door was opened and they all tramped noisily into the room—a party of men and women, twelve in all—and drew up in some sort of order, every man leading a woman by the hand. As for the men, though I had never seen the sea, I knew

at once that monsters so uncouth and rough could be none other than sailors. They were all dressed alike, and wore blue jackets with flannel shirts and coloured silk neckties; every man carried round his waist a rope, at the end of which was a knife; they wore three-cornered hats without lace or any kind of trimming; they had no wigs, but wore their own hair plastered with tallow, rolled up tightly and tied behind; and one bore a great and grisly beard most terrible to behold. Great boots covered their feet; their hands were smeared with tar; their faces were weather-beaten, being burnt by the sun and blown by the breeze; their eyes were clear and bright, but their cheeks were bruised as if they had been fighting: they were all laughing, and their countenances betokened the greatest satisfaction with everything. As for the women, they were young, and some of them, I suppose, were handsome, but they looked bold and rough. They were very finely dressed, their frocks being of silk and satin, with flowered shawls, and hats of a grandeur I had never before seen; immense hoops and great patches. But the fight out-

side had torn their finery, and more than one nymph had a black eye. However, these accidents had not diminished the general joy, and they were laughing with the men.

'Why—why!' roared the doctor, as he called them to attention by banging the table with his fist, so that the windows rattled, the women shrieked, and the plaster fell from the wall. 'What is this? Who are ye?'

The impudent fellow with the white apron who had brought us to the place, here stepped in, bringing with him another couple. He, too, had been fighting, for his face was bleeding and bruised. Fighting, I presently found, was too common in Fleet Market to call for any notice.

'What is this, Roger?' repeated the doctor. 'These tarpaulins are no cattle for my handling. Let them go to the Pen and Hand, or some other pigsty where they can be irregularly and illegally married for eighteenpence and a glass of rum.'

'Please your reverence,' said Roger, handling his nose, which was swollen, tenderly, 'they are honest gentlemen of the sea, paid off at Wapping but yester

night, still in their sea-going clothes by reason of their having as yet no time to buy long-shore rigging; not common sailors, but mates by rating in the ship's books, and anxious to be married by none other than your reverence.'

'Ay—ay! honest Roger.' The doctor's voice dropped and became soft and encouraging. 'Ay—ay! this is as it should be. Know they of the fee?'

'They wish me to offer your reverence,' said the clerk, 'a guinea apiece, and five guineas extra for your honour's trouble, if so be so small a gift is worth your acceptance; with half-a-crown apiece for the clerk, and a guinea for his nose, which I verily believe is broken in the bridge. I have had great trouble, your reverence, in conveying so large a party safe. And indeed I thought, at one time, the Rev. Mr. Ashwell would have had them all. But the gallant gentlemen knew what was best for them; and so, your honour, with a nose——'

The doctor shook his head and interrupted any further explanation.

'That would indeed have been a misfortune

for these brave fellows. Come, Roger, collect the fees, and to business with what speed we may.'

'Now then,' said Roger, roughly, 'money first, business afterwards. No fee, no marriage. Pay up, my lads!'

The men lugged out handfuls of gold from their pockets, and paid without hesitation what they were told. But the women grumbled, saying that for half-a-crown and a dram they would have been married quite as well, and so much more to spend. When the doctor had put the fees in his pocket, he advanced to the table and took up the Prayer-book. What would my father have said had he witnessed this sight?

Then Roger pulled out his greasy book, and put himself in place ready to say the responses. All being ready, the doctor again banged the table with his fist so that they all jumped, and the women screamed again, and more plaster fell off the wall.

'Now, all of you!' he roared, 'listen to me. The first man who interrupts, the first woman who laughs, the first who giggles, the first who dares to misbehave or to bring

contempt on this religious ceremony, I will with my own clerical hands pitch headforemost into the street. And *he shall remain unmarried!*'

Whether they were awed by his great voice and terrible aspect, the men being short of stature as all sailors seem to be, or whether they feared to be pitched through the window, or whether they trembled at the prospect of remaining unmarried (perhaps for life) if the doctor refused to perform the ceremony, I know not. What is quite certain is that they one and all, men and women, became suddenly as mute as mice, and perfectly obedient to the commands of Roger the clerk, who told them where to stand, when to kneel, what to say, and what to do. A curtain ring acted as wedding-ring for all.

The doctor would omit nothing from the service, which he read from beginning to end in his loud musical voice. When he had married the whole six, he shut the Prayer-book, produced six stamped certificates, rapidly filled in the names and dates, which he also entered in his 'Register,' a great book

with parchment cover. Roger acted as witness. Then the brides were presented by the doctor with the certificates of their marriage. The ceremony lasted altogether about half-an-hour.

'You are now, ladies and gentlemen,' he said, smiling pleasantly, 'married fast and firm, one to the other. I congratulate you. Marriage in the case of sailors and sailors' wives is a condition of peculiar happiness, as you will all of you presently discover. The husband, at the outset, is liable for the debts of his wife'—here the men looked sheepishly at each other—'this no doubt will be brought home to all of you. There are several brave gentlemen of the sea now languishing in the Fleet Prison through inability to pay off these encumbrances. They will continue to lie there for the whole term of their lives, these unfortunate men. Husbands are also liable for the debts incurred by their wives while they are abroad'—here one or two of the men murmured something about London Port and giving it a wide berth, which I did not understand. 'As for the wives of seafaring men, their blessings and privileges are

also peculiar and numerous. They will have to remain at home and pray for the safety of the husbands whom they will see perhaps once every five years or so: they will, in this widowed state, be able to practise many Christian virtues which those who enjoy the constant presence of a husband are less often called upon to illustrate: such are patience under privation, resignation, and hope. Most of them will find the allowance made to them by their husbands insufficient or irregularly paid. If any of them marry again, or be already married, it is, let me tell you, a hanging matter. Yea, there are already in Newgate hard by, several unfortunate women cast for execution who have married again while their husbands were at sea. Lying in the cells they are, waiting for the cart and the gallows!" Here the women looked at one another and trembled, while their cheeks grew pale. "It is too late now. Should there be any woman here who has committed the crime of bigamy, let that woman know that it is too late for aught but repentance. The gallows awaits her. You are now therefore, my friends, bound to each

other. I trust and hope that these marriages have not been hastily or lightly entered upon. You have heard the duties of husband to wife and wife to husband, in the words of the service duly read to you by a clergyman of the Church of England. Go now, perform those duties: be bright and shining examples of temperance, fidelity, and virtue. Should any man among you find that his marriage hath led him, through such a cause as I have indicated, to the King's Bench, or the Fleet, or the Compter; should he have to exchange, against his will, the free air of the sea for the confinement of a gaol, and the rolling deck for the narrow courtyard; should he see himself reduced (having never learned any handicraft or trade) to starvation through these liabilities of his wife, or should any woman among you have hereafter to stand her trial for bigamy either for this work newly accomplished or for any future crime of the same nature, it will then be your comfort to reflect that you were not married by an irregular, self-constituted, self-styled Fleet parson, but by an ordained clergyman and a Doctor of Divinity. Wherefore, I wish you

well. Now go, less noisily than you came. But the noise I impute to your ignorance, as not knowing the quality of the man into whose presence you so rudely pushed. As for the marriage feast, see that you enjoy it in moderation. Above all, let your liquors be good. To which end—I speak it purely out of my benevolence and for the good of head and stomach—you will find the rum at the Bishop Blaize cheap and wholesome. Be not tempted to prefer the Rainbow or the Naked Boy, where the liquor is deplorable; and perhaps, in an hour or so, I may look in and drink your healths. Roger, turn them out.'

They went away sheepish and crestfallen, who had come noisy and triumphant. I was ashamed, thinking of my father, and yet lost in wonder, looking at my uncle who had so easily tamed this savage crew.

'I am glad,' said the doctor, when they had gone, 'that this chance did not become the windfall of an irregular and unlicensed practitioner. They cannot say that I warned them not. Well, let them have their way. A few days more and the men will be afloat

again, all their money gone; and the women——'

'Will they starve, sir?' I asked.

'I doubt it much,' he replied. 'Come, child, I have thought of a plan for thee. Follow me. And you, good woman, come with us that you may see your charge in safety.'

The thing that I had seen was like a dream—the appearance of the disorderly sailors and the women whom they married; the words of the service read solemnly in this unhallowed room; the exaction of the money beforehand; the bleeding faces and marks of the recent fight; the exhortation of the doctor; the disappearance of the actors; the swollen nose, black eye, and the importance of the clerk reading the responses—what strange place was this whereunto I had been led? One pitied, too, the poor fellows on whom Fate had bestowed such wives. I thought, child as I was, how terrible must be life encumbered with such women! Womanlike, I was harder on the women than the men. Yet truly, women are what men make them.

'Follow me, child.'

He led us out of the house, turning to the right. In the market was a lot of country people who were standing about a stall. And we heard a voice: 'There's the doctor—there goes the great Dr. Shovel.'

My uncle drew himself up to his full height, and stalked grandly along with the eyes of the people upon him. 'See,' he seemed to say, by the swelling folds of his gown, 'see my fame, how widespread it is—my reputation, how great!'

He stopped at the corner of Fleet Lane, where the houses were no longer taverns, and announcements of marriages were no longer to be seen. It was a house of three stories high, with a door which, like all the doors in that neighbourhood, stood ever open.

Here the doctor stopped and addressed Mrs. Gambit:

'You spoke of safety. I am about to confide this child to the care of two gentlewomen, poor but of good birth and character, whom unjust laws and the wickedness of men have condemned to imprisonment. I know of no better guardians; but you shall satisfy your-

self before you go away. Wait a moment while I confer with the ladies.'

We stayed below for ten minutes. Then my uncle came down the stairs, and bade me return with him to be presented to the ladies, who had kindly accepted the charge on condition, he said, of my good conduct.

I followed him, Mrs. Gambit keeping close to me. We stopped at a door on the first floor. The room was poor and shabby: the furniture, of which there was not much, was old and worn: there was no carpet: a white blind was half drawn over the window: the place, to judge by the presence of a saucepan, a kettle, and a gridiron, was apparently a kitchen as well as a sitting-room: all, except a great portrait of a gentleman, in majestic wig and splendid gown, which hung over the fireplace, was mean and pinched. Two ladies, of fifty or thereabouts, stood before me, holding out hands of welcome.

They were both exactly alike, being small and thin, with hollow cheeks, bright eyes, and pointed features like a pair of birds: they wore white caps, a sort of grey frock in cheap stuff: their hair was white: their hands

were thin, with delicate fingers, transparent like the fingers of those who have been long in bed with sickness: they were of the same height, and appeared to be of the same age —namely, fifty or thereabouts. My first thought, as I looked at them, was that they had not enough to eat—which, indeed, like all first thoughts, was correct, because that had generally been the case with these poor creatures.

'Kitty,' said the doctor, taking me by the hand, 'I present you to Mistress Esther Pimpernel'—here the lady on the left dipped and curtsied, and I also, mighty grave—'and to Mrs. Deborah Pimpernel'—here the same ceremony with the lady on the right. 'Ladies, this is my niece Kitty Pleydell, daughter of my deceased sister Barbara and her husband Lawrence Pleydell of pious memory. I trust that in consenting thus generously to receive this child in your ward and keeping, you will find a reward for your benevolence in her obedience, docility and gratitude.'

'Doctor,' murmured Mrs. Esther, in a voice like a turtledove's for softness, 'I am sure

that a niece of yours must be all sensibility and goodness.'

'Goodness, at least,' said her sister, in sharper tones.

I saw that the difference between the sisters lay chiefly in their voices.

'She will, I trust, be serviceable to you,' said the doctor, waving his hand. 'She hath been well and piously brought up to obedient ways. Under your care, ladies, I look for a good account of her.'

'Dear and reverend sir,' Mrs. Esther cooed, 'we are pleased and happy to be of use to you in this matter. No doubt little miss, who is well grown of her years, will repay your kindness with her prayers. As for us, the memory of your past and present goodness——'

'Tut, tut!' he replied, shaking his great head till his cheeks waggled, 'let us hear no more of that. In this place'—here he laid his right hand upon his heart, elevating his left, and leaning his head to one side—'in this place, where infamy and well-deserved misery attend most of those who dwell in it, it is yours, as it should be mine, to keep

burning continually the pure flame of a Christian life.'

'How sweet! how noble!' murmured the sisters.

Was it possible? The man whom we had just seen reading the service of Mother Church, which my father had taught me to regard as little less sacred than the words of the Bible itself, in a squalid room, reeking with the fumes of rum and stale tobacco, before a gang of half-drunken sailors, assumed naturally and easily, as if *it belonged to him*, the attitude and language of one devoted entirely to the contemplation and practice of virtue and good works. Why, his face glowed with goodness like the sun at noonday, or the sun after a shower, or, say, the sun after a good action. The doctor, indeed, as I learned later, could assume almost any character he pleased. It pleased him, not out of hypocrisy, but because for a time it was a return to the promise of his youth, to be with these ladies the devout Christian priest. In that character he felt, I am convinced, the words which came spontaneously to his lips: for the moment he *was* that character. Outside, in

the Fleet Market, he was the great Dr. Shovel—great, because among the Fleet parsons he was the most successful, the most learned, the most eloquent, the most important. In his own room he married all comers, after the manner we have seen; and it raised the envy of his rivals to see how the crowd flocked to him. But in the evening he received his friends, and drank and talked with them in such fashion as I never saw, but of which I have heard. Again, it raised their envy to witness how men came from all quarters to drink with the doctor. At that time he was no longer the Christian advocate, nor the clergyman; he was a rollicking, jovial, boon companion, who delighted to tell better stories, sing better songs, and hold better talk—meaning more witty, not more spiritual talk—than any of those who sat with him. I have never been able to comprehend what pleasure men, especially men of mature years, can find in telling stories, and laughing, drinking, smoking tobacco, and singing with one another. Women find their pleasures in more sober guise: they may lie in small things, but they are inno-

cent. Think what this world would be were the women to live like the men, as disorderly, as wastefully, as noisily!

'Now, good woman,' said my uncle to Mrs. Gambit, 'are you satisfied that my niece is in safe hands?'

'The hands are good enough,' replied the woman, looking round her; 'but the place——'

'The place is what it is,' said the doctor, sharply; 'we cannot alter the place.'

'Then I will go, sir.'

With that she gave me my parcel of money, kissed me and bade me farewell, curtsied to the ladies, and left us.

'I shall send up, ladies,' said the doctor, 'a few trifles of additional furniture: a couple of chairs, one of them an arm-chair—but not for this great, strong girl, if you please—a bed, a shelf for books; some cups and saucers we shall provide for you. And now, ladies, I wish you good-morning. And for your present wants—I mean the wants of this hungry country maid, who looks as if mutton hung in toothsome legs on every verdant hedge—this will, I think, suffice;' he placed

money in Mrs. Esther's hand—I could not but think how he had earned that money—and left us.

When he was gone the two ladies looked at each other with a strange, sad, and wistful expression, and Mrs. Esther, with the guineas in her hand, burst into tears.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW KITTY BEGAN TO ENJOY THE LIBERTIES OF THE FLEET.

Her tears disconcerted me extremely. What did she cry for? But she presently recovered and dried her eyes. Then she looked at me thoughtfully, and said:

'Sister, I suppose this child has been accustomed to have a dinner every day?'

'Surely,' replied Miss Deborah. 'And to-day we shall all dine.'

To-day we should all dine? Were there, then, days when we should all go hungry?

'You must know, my dear,' Miss Esther explained in a soft, sad voice, 'that we are very poor. We have, therefore, on many days in the week to go without meat. Otherwise we should have to do worse'—she looked

round the room and shuddered—'we should have to give up the independence of our solitude. Hunger, my child, is not the worst thing to bear.'

'A piece of roasting-beef, sister,' said Mrs. Deborah, who had now assumed a hat and a cloak, 'with a summer cabbage, and a pudding in the gravy.'

'And I think, sister,' said Mrs. Esther, her eyes lighting up eagerly, 'that we might take our dinner—the child might like to take her dinner—at twelve to-day.'

While Mrs. Deborah went into the market, I learned that the two sisters had taken no food except bread and water for a week, and that their whole stock now amounted to two shillings in money and part of a loaf. What a strange world was this of London, in which gentlewomen had their lodging in so foul a place and starved on bread and water!

'But,' she repeated with a wan smile, 'there are worse things than hunger. First, we must pay our rent. And here we are at least alone; here we may continue to remember our breeding.'

Before Mistress Deborah returned, I also

learned that they were chiefly dependent on a cousin for supplies of money, which were made to them grudgingly (and indeed he was not rich), and that the doctor had provided for my maintenance with the offer of so large a weekly sum that it promised to suffice for the wants of all.

'We are,' said Mrs. Esther, 'but small eaters; a little will suffice for us. But you, child, are young; eat without fear, eat your fill; the money is for you, and we shall grudge you nothing.'

While the beef was roasting I noticed how their eyes from time to time, in spite of themselves, would be fixed upon the meat with a hungry and eager look. Nor had I any enjoyment of the meal till I had seen their pangs appeased. After the plenty of the Vicarage and the Hall, to think of bread and water, and not too much bread, for days together! Yet, hungry as they were, they ate but little; it shamed me to go on eating, being always a girl of a vigorous appetite and hard-set about the hour of noon; it shamed me at first, also, to observe their ways of thrift, so that not the least crumb

should be wasted. Mrs. Deborah read my thoughts.

'In this place,' she said, 'we learn to value what it takes money to procure. Yet there are some here poorer than ourselves. Eat, child, eat. For us this has been, indeed, a feast of Belteshazzar.'

Dinner over, we unpacked my box, and they asked me questions. I found that they were proud of their birth and breeding; the portrait over the fire was, they told me, that of their father, once Lord Mayor of London, and they congratulated me upon being myself a Pleydell, which, they said, was a name very well known in the country, although many great city families might be ignorant of it.

'No gift, my dear,' said Mrs. Esther, 'is so precious as gentle blood. Everything else may be won, but birth never.'

All day long there went on the same dreadful noise of shouting, crying, calling, bawling, rolling of carts, cracking of whips, and trampling of horses' feet. In the evening I asked, when the sun went down, but the noise decreased not, if it was always thus.

'Always,' they replied. 'There is no cessation, day or night. It is part,' said Mrs. Deborah, 'of our punishment. 'We are condemned, child; for the sin of having a negligent trustee, we go in captivity, shame, and degradation all our lives.'

'Nay,' said her sister, 'not degradation, sister. No one but herself can degrade a gentlewoman.'

Truly, the noise was terrible. When I read in the 'Paradise Lost,' of fallen angels in their dark abode, I think of Fleet Market and the Fleet Rules. It began in the early morning with the rolling of the carts: all day long in the market there was a continual crying of the butchers: 'Buy, buy, ladies—buy! Rally up, ladies—rally up!' There were quarrels unceasing and ever beginning, with fights, shouting and cursing: the fish-women quarrelled at their stalls; the poultry-wives quarrelled over their baskets; the porters quarrelled over their burdens; the carters over the right of way; the ragamuffin boys over stolen fruit. There was nothing pleasant, nothing quiet, nothing to refresh; nothing but noise, brawling, and contention. And if

any signs of joy, these only drunken laughter from open tavern-doors.

Thus I began to live, being then a maid of sixteen years and seven months, in the Rules and Liberties of the Fleet Prison ; surely as bad a place, outside Newgate Prison, as could be found for a girl brought up in innocence and virtue. For, let one consider the situation of the Rules. They include all those houses which lie between the ditch, or rather the market, on the west, and the Old Bailey on the east—fit boundaries for such a place, the filthy turbid ditch and the criminal's gaol —and Fleet Lane on the north to Ludgate Hill on the south. These streets are beyond and between the abodes of respectability and industry. On the east was the great and wealthy City with the merchants' houses ; on the west the streets and squares where the families of the country had their town residence ; on the south, the river ; on the north, the dark and gloomy streets of Clerkenwell, where thieves lay in hiding and the robbers of the road had their customary quarters. Why, Jonathan Wyld himself, the greatest of villains, lived hard by in Ship Court. Is

there, anywhere, in any town, an acre more thickly covered with infamy, misery, starvation, and wretchedness ?

If we walked abroad, we could not go north because of Clerkenwell, where no honest woman may trust herself : if we went south we had to walk the whole length of the market, past the marrying taverns, so that shame fell upon my heart to think how my uncle was one of those who thus disgraced his cloth: when we got to the end, we might walk over the Fleet Bridge, among the noisy sellers of quack medicines, pills, powders, hot furmety, pies, flounders, mackerel, and oysters; or on Ludgate Hill, where the touts of the Fleet parsons ran up and down inviting couples to be married, and the Morocco men went about, book in hand, to sell their lottery shares. The most quiet way when we took the air was to cross Holborn Bridge, and so up the hill past St. Andrew's Church, where, if the weather were fine, we might go as far as the gardens of Gray's Inn, and there sit down among the trees and feel for a little the joy of silence.

Said Mrs. Deborah, one day, when we two

had sat there, under the trees, for half an hour, listening to the cawing of the rooks:

'Child, the place'—meaning the Rules—'is the City of Destruction after Christian and Christiana, and the boys, and Mercy were all gone away.'

We lived in one room, which was both kitchen and parlour. We had no servant; the doctor's provision kept us in simple plenty; we cleaned and dusted the place for ourselves; we cooked our dinners, and washed our dishes; we made our dresses; we did for ourselves all those things which are generally done by a servant. Mrs. Esther said that there was no shame in doing things which, if left undone, would cause a gentlewoman to lose her self-respect. 'Twas all, except the portrait of her father, that she had left of her former life, and to this she would cling as something dearer than life.

There were other lodgers in the house. All who lodged there were, of course, prisoners 'enjoying' the Rules—who else would live in the place? On the ground-floor was Sir Miles Lackington, Baronet. He was not yet thirty, yet he had already got rid

of a great and noble estate by means of gambling, and now was compelled to hide his head in this refuge, and to live upon an allowance of two guineas made weekly to him by a cousin. This, one would have thought, was a disgrace enough to overwhelm a gentleman of his rank and age with shame. But it touched him not, for he was ever gay, cheerful, and ready to laugh. He was kind to my ladies and to me; his manners, when he was sober, were gentle; though his face was always flushed and cheeks swollen by reason of his midnight potations, he was still a handsome fellow; he was careless of his appearance as of his fortune; he would go with waistcoat unbuttoned, wig awry, neck-cloth loose, ruffles limp; but however he went it was with a laugh. When he received his two guineas he generally gave away the half among his friends. In the evening they used to carry him home to his room on the ground-floor, too drunk to stand.

I soon got to know him, and we had frequent talks. He seemed to be ever meeting me on the stairs when I went a-marketing; he called upon us often, and would sit with

me during the warm summer afternoons, when the sisters dropped off to sleep. I grew to like him, and he encouraged me to say freely what I thought, even to the extent of rating him for his profligate practices.

'Why,' he would say, laughing, 'I am at the lowest—I can go no lower; yet I have my two guineas a week. I have enough to eat, I drink freely: what more can I want?'

I told him what his life seemed to me.

He laughed again at this, but perhaps uneasily.

'Does it seem so terrible a thing,' he said, leaning against the window with his hands in his pockets, 'to have no cares? Believe me, Kitty, Fortune has brought me into a harbour where winds and tempests never blow. While I had my estate, my conscience plagued me night and morning. And yet I knew that all must fly. Hazard doth always serve her children so, and leaves them naked. Well—it is gone. So can I play no more. But he who plays should keep sober if he would win. Now that I cannot play, I may drink. And again, when, formerly, I was rich and a prodigal, friend and enemy came to me with

advice. I believe they thought the Book of Proverbs had been written specially to meet my case, so much did they quote the words of Solomon, Agar, and Lemuel. But, no doubt, there have been fools before, and truly it helpeth a fool no whit to show him his folly. "As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools." I remember that proverb. Now that Hazard hath taken all, there is no longer occasion for advice. Child, you look upon one who hath thrown away his life, and yet is happier in his fall and repents not. For I make no doubt but that, had I my fortune back, 'twould fly away again in the same fashion.'

He concluded with an allusion to the Enemy of Mankind, for which I rebuked him, and he laughed, saying:

'Pretty Puritan, I will offend no more.'

Had I been older and more experienced, I should have known or suspected why he came so often and met me daily. Kitty had found favour in the sight of this dethroned king. He loved the maid: her freshness, her rosy cheeks, her youth, her innocence pleased him,

I suppose. We know not, we women, for what qualities there are in us that we are loved by men, so that they will commit so many follies for our sake.

'Thou art such a girl, sweet Kitty,' he said to me, one day, 'so pretty and so good, as would tempt a man wallowing contentedly in the pigsties of the world, to get up, wash himself, and go cleanly, for thy sake. Yet what a miserable wretch should I be did I thus learn to feel my own downfall!'

And again he told me once that he was too far gone to love me; and not far enough gone to do me an injury.

'Wherefore,' he added, 'I must worship at thy shrine in silent admiration.'

It was kindly done of Sir Miles to spare an ignorant girl. For so ignorant was Kitty, and so brotherly did he seem, that had he asked her to become his wife, I think she would have consented. Oh, the fine state, to be my Lady Lackington, and to live in the Rules of the Fleet!

Another lodger in our house, a man whose face inspired me with horror, so full of selfish passion was it, was a Captain Dunquerque.

With him were his wife and children. It was of the children, poor things, that our Esther spoke when she said there were some in the place poorer than themselves; for the wife and children starved, while the captain, their father, ate and drank his fill. A gloomy man, as well as selfish, who reviled the fate which he had brought upon himself. Yet for all his reviling, he spared himself nothing so that his children might have something. I am glad that this bad man has little to do with my history.

Another lodger, who had the garret at the top, was Solomon Stallabras, the poet.

It is very well known that the profession of letters, of all the trades, callings, and conditions of men, is the most precarious and the most miserable. I doubt, indeed, whether that ought to be called a profession which requires no training, no colleges or schools, no degree, and no diploma. Other professions are, in a way, independent: the barrister doth not court, though he may depend upon, the favour of attorneys; the rector of the parish doth not ask the farmers to support him, but takes the tithes to which he is entitled; the

poor author, however, is obliged to receive of his publisher whatever is offered, nor is there any corporate body or guild of authors by whom the situation of the poet may be considered and his condition improved. Alone among learned men, the author is doomed to perpetual dependence and poverty. Indeed, when one considers it, scarce anything else is to be expected, for, in becoming an author, a man is so vain as to expect that to him will be granted what has been given to no man except Shakespeare—a continual flow of strength, spirits, ingenuity, wit, and dexterity, so as to sustain, without diminution or relaxation, the rapid production of works for the delight of the world. I say rapid, because the books are bought by publishers at a low rate, though they are sold to the public at large sums. And, if we think of it, scarce any author produces more than one or two books which please the world. Therefore, when the fountain runs dry, whither is that poor author to turn? The public will have none of him; his publisher will have none of him; there remains, it is true, one hope, and that unworthy, to get subscriptions for a volume

which he will never produce, because he will have eaten up beforehand the money paid for it before it is written.

The Fleet Prison and its Rules have always been a favourite resort and refuge for poets and men of letters. Robert Lloyd died there, but long after I went away; Richard Savage died there; Churchill was married in the place, and would have died there, had he not anticipated his certain fate by dying early; Samuel Boyce died there; Sir Richard Baker died there; William Oldys, who died, to be sure, outside the Rules, yet drank every night within them; lastly, within a stone's throw of the Rules, though he was never a prisoner, died the great John Bunyan himself.

I heard my ladies, from time to time, talk of a certain Mr. Stallabras. They wondered why he did not call as usual, and laid the blame upon me; little madam had made him shy. One day, however, Mrs. Esther being called out by one of Captain Dunquerque's children, came back presently, saying that Mr. Stallabras was starving to death in his room.

Mrs. Deborah made no reply, but instantly hurried to the cupboard, when she took down the cold beef which was to be our dinner, and cut off three or four goodly slices; these she laid on a plate, with bread and salt, and put the whole upon a napkin; and then she disappeared swiftly.

'The poor young man! the dear young man!' cried Mrs. Esther, wringing her hands. 'What can we do? My dear, the sweetest and most mellifluous of poets! The pride and glory of his age! It is he who wrote "Hours of the Night," the "Pleasures of Solitude," the "Loves of Amoret and Amoretta," and other delightful verses; yet they let him languish in the Fleet! What are my countrymen thinking of? Would it not be better to rescue (while still living) so ingenious and charming a writer from his poverty, than to give him (as they must), after his death, a grave in Westminster Abbey?'

I asked her if we should read together these delightful poems.

'We have no copy,' she said. 'Mr. Stallabras, who is all sensibility, insists, from time

to time, upon our having copies, so that we may read them aloud to him. Yet his necessities are such that he is fain to take them away again and sell them. As for his manners, my dear, they are very fine, being such as to confer distinction upon the Rules. He has not the easy bearing of Sir Miles Lackington, of course, which one would not expect save in a man born to good breeding; but he possesses in full measure the courtesy which comes from study and self-dignity. Yet he is but a hosier's son.'

Mrs. Deborah here returned, bearing an empty plate.

She had trouble at first, she said, to persuade him to eat. His prejudices as a gentleman and a scholar were offended by the absence of horse-radish; but, as he had eaten nothing for two days, he was induced to waive this scruple, and presently made a hearty meal. She had also persuaded him to come downstairs in the evening, and take a dish of tea.

Thanks to the doctor's liberality in the matter of my weekly board, tea was now a luxury in which we could sometimes indulge.

Nothing gave Mrs. Esther more gratification than the return, after long deprivation, to that polite beverage.

At about five o'clock the poet made his appearance. He was short of stature, with a turned-up nose, and was dressed in a drab-coloured coat, with a bag wig, and shoes with steel buckles. Everything that he wore had once been fine, but their splendour was faded now; his linen was in rags, his shoes in holes; but he carried himself with pride. His dignity did not depend upon his purse; he bore his head high, because he thought of his fame. It inflicted no wound to his pride to remember that he had that day been on the eve of starvation, and was still without a farthing.

'Miss Kitty,' he said, bowing very low, 'you see before you one who, though a favourite of the Muses, is no favourite of Fortune:

> '"'Gainst hostile fate his heart is calm the while,
> Though Fortune frown, the tuneful sisters smile."

Poetry, ladies, brings with it the truest consolation.'

'And religion,' said Mrs. Esther.

'There lives not—be sure—the wretch,' cried the poet, 'who would dissociate religion and the Muse.'

This was very grand, and pleased us all. We had our dish of tea, with bread and butter. I went on cutting it for the poet till the loaf was quite gone.

During the evening he gave utterance to many noble sentiments—so noble, indeed, that they seemed to me taken out of books. And before he went away he laid down his views as to the profession of letters, of which I have already spoken, perhaps, too severely.

'It is the mission of the poet and author,' he said, 'to delight, and to improve while delighting. The man of science may instruct; the poet embodies the knowledge, and dresses it up in a captivating way to attract the people: the divine teaches the dogmas of the Church; the poet conveys, in more pleasing form, the lessons and instructions of religion: the philosopher and moralist lay down the laws of our being; the author, by tropes and figures, by fiction, by poetry, shows the proper conduct of life, and teaches how the way of virtue leads to happi-

ness. Is not this a noble and elevating career? Does not a man do well who says to himself, "This shall be my life; this my lot"?'

He paused, and we murmured assent to his enthusiasm.

'It is true,' he went on, 'that the ungrateful world thinks little of its best friends; that it allows me—*me*, Solomon Stallabras, to languish in the Rules of the Fleet. Even that, however, has its consolation; because, ladies, it has brought me the honour and happiness of your friendship.'

He rose, saluted us all three in turn, and sat down again.

'Art,' he went on, 'so inspires a man with great thoughts, that it makes more than a gentleman—it makes a nobleman—of him. Who, I would ask, when he reads the sorrows of Clarissa, thinks of the trade—the mere mechanical trade—in which the author's money was earned? I cannot but believe that the time will come when the Court itself, unfriendly as it now is to men of letters, will confer titles and place upon that poor poet whose very name cannot now reach the walls of the palace.'

My ladies' good fortune (I mean in receiving the weekly stipend for my maintenance) was thus shared by the starving poet, whom they no longer saw, helpless to relieve him, suffering the privation of hunger. Often have I observed one or other of the sisters willingly go without her dinner, pleading a headache, in order that her portion might be reserved for Mr. Stallabras.

'For sensibility,' said Mrs. Esther, 'is like walking up a hill: it promotes appetite.'

'So does youth,' said Mrs. Deborah, more practical. 'Mr. Stallabras is still a young man, Kitty; though you think thirty old.'

That he was a very great poet we all agreed, and the more so when, after a lucky letter, he secured a subscriber or two for his next volume, and was able to present us once more with a book of his own poetry. I do not know whether he more enjoyed hearing me read them aloud (for then he bowed, spread his hands, and inclined his head this way and that, in appreciation of the melody and delicacy of the sentiments), or whether he preferred to read them himself; for then he could stop when he pleased, with, 'This

idea, ladies, was conceived while wandering amid the fields near Bagnigge Wells;' 'This came to me while watching the gay throng in the Mall;' 'This, I confess, was an inspiration caught in church.'

'Kitty should enter these confessions in a book,' said Mrs. Esther. 'Surely they will become valuable in the day—far distant, I trust—when your life has to be written, Mr. Stallabras.'

'Oh, madam!' He bowed again, and lifted his hands in deprecation. But he was pleased. 'Perhaps,' he said, 'meaner bards have found a place in the Abbey, and a volume dedicated to their lives. If Miss Kitty will condescend to thus preserve recollections of me, I shall be greatly flattered.'

I did keep a book, and entered in it all that dropped from his lips about himself, his opinions, his maxims, his thoughts, and so forth. He gradually got possessed of the idea that I would myself some day write his life, and he began insensibly to direct his conversation mainly to me.

Sometimes he met me in the market, or on the stairs, when he would tell me more.

'I always knew,' he said, 'from the very first, that I was born to greatness. It was in me as a child, when, like Pope, I lisped in numbers. My station, originally, was not lofty, Miss Kitty.' He spoke as if he had risen to a dazzling height. 'I was but the son of a hosier, born in Fetter Lane, and taught at the school, or academy, kept by one Jacob Crooks, who was handier with the rod than with the Gradus ad Parnassum. But I read, and taught myself; became at first the hack of Mr. Dodsley, and gradually rose to eminence.'

He had, indeed, risen; he was the occupant of a garret; his fame lay in his own imagination; and he had not a guinea in the world.

'Miss Kitty,' he said, one day, 'there is only one thing that disqualifies you from being my biographer.'

I asked him what that was.

'You are not, as you should be, my wife. If virtue and beauty fitted you for the station of a poet's wife, the thing were easy. Alas, child! the poet is poor, and his mistress would be poorer. Nevertheless, believe that the

means, and not the will, are wanting to make thee my Laura, my Stella, and me thy Petrarch, or thy Sidney.'

It was not till later that I understood how this starveling poet, as well as the broken baronet, had both expressed their desire (under more favourable circumstances) to make love to me. Grand would have been my lot as Lady Lackington, but grander still as Mistress Stallabras, wife of the illustrious poet, who lived, like the sparrows, from hand to mouth.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW KITTY LEARNED TO KNOW THE DOCTOR.

Those evenings of riot from which Sir Miles was so often carried home speechless, were spent in no other place than that very room where I had seen the marriage of the sailors; and the president of the rabble rout was no other than the doctor himself.

I learned this of Sir Miles. If my ladies knew it, of which I am not certain, they were content to shut their eyes to it, and to think of the thing as one of the faults which women, in contempt and pity, ascribe to the strange nature of man. I cannot, being now of ripe years, believe that Heaven hath created in man a special aptitude for debauchery, sin, and profligacy, while women have been designed for the illustration of

virtues which are the opposite to them. So that, when I hear it said that it is the way of men, I am apt to think that way sinful.

It was Sir Miles himself who told me of it one morning. I found him leaning against the doorpost with a tankard of ale in his hand.

'Fie, Sir Miles!' I said. 'Is it not shameful for a gentleman to be carried home at night, like a pig?'

'It is,' he replied. 'Kitty, the morning is the time for repentance. I repent until I have cleared my brain with this draught of cool October.'

'It is as if a man should drag a napkin in the mud of the Fleet Ditch to clean it,' I said.

He drank off his tankard, and said he felt better.

'Pretty Miss Kitty,' he said, 'it is a fine morning; shall we abroad? Will you trust yourself with me to view the shops in Cheapside or the beaux in the Mall? I am at thy service, though, for a Norfolk baronet, my ruffles are of the shabbiest.'

I told him that I would ask Mistress

Esther for permission. He said he wanted first a second pint, as the evening had been long and the drink abundant, after which his brain would be perfectly clear and his hand steady.

I told him it was a shame that a gentleman of his rank should mate with men whose proper place was among the thieves of Turnmill Street, or the porters of Chick Lane, and that I would not walk with a man whose brain required a quart of strong ale in the morning to clear it.

'As for my companions,' he said, taking the second pint which the boy brought him and turning it about in his hands, 'we have very good company in the Liberties—quite as good as your friend Christian, in that story you love so much, might have had in Vanity Fair, had he been a lad of mettle and a toper. There are gentlemen of good family, like myself; poets like Solomon Stallabras; merchants, half-pay captains and broke lieutenants; clerks, tradesmen, lawyers, parsons, farmers, men of all degrees. It is like the outside world, except that here all are equal who can pay their shot. Why, with the

doctor at the head of the table, and a bowl of punch just begun, hang me if I know any place where a man may feel more comfortable or drink more at his ease.'

'The doctor?' I asked. Now I had seen so little of my uncle that I had almost forgotten the marriage of the sailors, and was beginning again to think of him as the pious and serious minister who spoke of sacred things to my guardians. 'The doctor?'

'Ay;' Sir Miles drank off the whole of his second pint. 'Who else?' His voice became suddenly thick, and his eyes fixed, with a strange light in them. 'Who else but the doctor? Why, what would the Rules be without the doctor? He is our prince, our bishop, our chaplain—what you will—the right reverend his most gracious majesty the King of the Rules.' Sir Miles waved his hand dramatically. 'He keeps us sweet; he polishes our wits; but for him we should be wallowing swine: he brings strangers and visitors to enliven us; drinks with us, sings with us, makes wit for us from the treasures of his learning; condescends to call us his friends; pays our shot for us; lends us

money; gives food to the starving, and drink—yes, drink, by gad! to the thirsty, and clothes to the naked. Ah, poor girl! you can never see the doctor in his glory, with all his admirers round him, and every man a glass of punch in his hand and a clean tobacco-pipe in his mouth. The doctor? he is our boast; a most complete and perfect doctor; the pride of Cambridge; the crown and sum of all doctors in divinity!'

He had forgotten, I suppose, his invitation to take me for a walk, for he left me here, staggering off in the direction of the Hand and Pen, where, I doubt not, he spent the rest of his idle and wasted day.

It would have been useless and cruel to talk to my guardian about this discovery. It was another thing to be ashamed of. Sir Miles told me less than the truth. In fact the doctor's house was the nightly resort of all those residents in the Rules whom he would admit to his society. Hither, too, came, attracted by his reputation for eloquence, wit, and curious knowledge, gentlemen from the Temple, Lincoln's Inn, and other places, who were expected, as a contribution to the even-

ing, to send for bowls of punch. But of this presently.

I saw my uncle seldom. He visited the sisters from time to time, and never failed to ask particularly after my progress in knowledge, and especially in the doctrines of the Church of England. On these occasions he generally left behind him, as a present, some maxim or precept tending to virtue, which we could repeat after his departure and turn over in our minds at leisure. Once he found me alone, Mrs. Deborah being indisposed and confined to her room, where her sister was nursing her. He took advantage of their absence to impress upon me the necessity of circumspection in my manner of life.

'Heaven knows, child,' he said, 'what thy future will be. Hither come none but profligates and spendthrifts. Yet what else can I do with thee? Where bestow thee?'

'Oh, sir!' I said, 'let me not be taken from my dear ladies.'

'Thou shalt not, child; at least for the present. But it is bad for thee to live here; it is bad for thee to have as an uncle one whose life is sadly inconsistent with his Christian

profession, and who might despair, were it not for the example of Solomon (methinks from his history may be sucked consolation by all elderly and reverend sinners). Like him, what I lack in practice I partly make up with precept. He who, like me, is a Fleet parson, should be judged differently from his fellows: he is without the license and therefore hath forfeited paternal affection of his bishop; he is exposed to temptations which beset not other folk; among those who flock to him for marriage are some who would fain commute their fees for brandy and strong drinks, or even bilk the clergyman altogether—a sin which it is difficult to believe can be forgiven. Hence arise strifes and wraths, unseemly for one who wears a cassock. Hither come those who seek good fellowship and think to find it in the Rules: Templars, young bloods, and wits. Hence arise drinking and brawling; and as one is outside the law, so to speak, so one is tempted to neglect the law. I say nothing of the temptations of an empty purse. These I felt, with many prickings and instigations of the Evil One, while I was yet curate of St. Martin's-in-the-

Fields, before I escaped my creditors by coming here. Then I was poor, and found, as the Wise Man says, that 'The poor is hated even of his own neighbour.'

He went on, half preaching, half talking.

A man who sinned greatly, yet preached much; who daily fell, yet daily exhorted his neighbour to stand upright; who knew and loved, as one loves a thing impossible to attain, the life of virtue; who drank, laughed, and bawled songs of an evening with his boon companions; who married all comers, no question asked, without scruple and without remorse, a priest whose life was a disgrace to his profession; who did kind and generous things, and paid that homage to Virtue which becomes one who knows her loveliness.

It pleased him to talk, but only with me, about himself. He was always excusing himself to me, ashamed of his life, yet boasting of it and glorying in it; conscious of his infamy, and yet proud of his success; always thinking by what plea he could justify himself, and maintain his self-respect.

'I am a man,' he said, 'who is the best of a bad profession. My work is inglorious, but

I am glorious; my rivals, who would rob me of my very practice, do not hate me, but esteem and envy me. I have, yea, outside these Rules, friends who love me still; some of them pity me, and some would see me (which is impossible) restored to the fold and bosom of the Church; some who drink with me, talk with me, borrow of me, walk with me, smoke with me, and are honoured by my friendship. There is no man living who would wish me harm. Surely, I am one of those who do good to themselves, whom, therefore, their fellow-men respect.'

I have said that he was generous. Sir Miles spoke the truth when he declared that the doctor fed the starving and clothed the naked. Truly it seems to me natural to believe that these good deeds of his must be a set-off to the great wickedness of his life. There were no occupants of the prison and its Liberties who were rich. Some there were who would have starved but for the charity of their friends. The poor prisoners were allowed to beg, but how could poor gentlewomen like my guardians bear to beg for daily bread? Rather would they starve. As

for the prison, I know nothing of it; I never saw the inside; it was enough for me to see its long and dreary wall. I used to think at night of the poor creatures shut up there in hopeless misery, as I thought, though Sir Miles declared that most of them were happier in the prison than out; and beside the latticed gate there stood every day a man behind bars begging with a plate and crying: 'Pity the poor prisoners.'

Is it not sad that the same punishment of imprisonment must be meted out to the rogue and the debtor, save that we let the rogue go free while we keep the debtor locked up? Truly, the Vicar of St. Bride's or even the Dean of St. Paul's himself could preach no better sermon, could use no words more fitted to arrest the profligate and bring the thoughtless to reason, than that doleful cry behind the bars. Nor could any more salutary lesson be impressed upon young spendthrifts than to take them from house to house in the Rules and show them the end of graceless ways.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW KITTY SPENT HER TIME.

As soon as they were settled together, and the ladies had decided in their own minds that the girl would lighten their lives, they resolved that Kitty's education must not be neglected, and for this end began to devise such a comprehensive scheme as would have required the staff of a whole university to carry it through. Everything was set down (upon a slate) which it behoved a girl to know. Unfortunately the means at their disposal did not allow of this great scheme. Thus it was fitting that music should be taught: Mrs. Deborah had once been a proficient on the spinnet, but there was no spinnet to be had; the French tongue forms part of polite education, but though both

ladies had learned it of old, their memory was defective, and they had neither dictionary nor grammar nor any book in the language; limning, both with pencil and in water-colours, should be taught, but the sisters could neither of them draw, and hardly knew a curve from a straight line. Caligraphy is almost a necessary, but the handwriting of both ladies was tremulous, and of antiquated fashion; they knew not the modern Italian hand. There was in the Rules a professor in the art, and an attempt was made to get lessons from him. But he was already old and hastening to the grave, which speedily closed over him; his hand shook, because he drank strong waters; his coat was stained with beer and punch; his wig smelt always of tobacco.

Mrs. Deborah undertook, as a beginning, to teach the girl book-keeping by single and double entry. How or why she ever came to learn this science has never been understood. Yet she knew it, and was proud of it.

'It is a science,' she said, 'which controls the commerce of the world. By its means are we made rich; by the aid of book-keeping we apportion the profit and the loss, which

are the rewards of the prudent or the punishment of the thriftless. Without book-keeping, my dear, the mysteries and methods of which I am about to impart to you, neither a Whittington, nor a Gresham, nor even a Pimpernel, would have risen to be Lord Mayor of London.'

Kitty only imperfectly grasped the rudiments of the science. No doubt, had she been placed in a position of life where it was required, she would have found it eminently useful. Mrs. Esther, for her part, taught her embroidery and sampler work. As for preserving, pickling, making of pastry and home-made wines, cookery, distilling, and so forth, although the sisters had been in their younger days notable, it was impossible to teach these arts, because, even if there had been anything to pickle or preserve, there was only one sitting-room in which to do it. Therefore, to her presen sorrow, Kitty speedily forgot all that she had formerly learned in the still-room at Lady Levett's. For there is no station so exalted in which a lady is not the better for knowing the way in which such things should be done, if it is only that she may keep her

maids in order. And if, as the learned Dr. Johnson hath informed us, a lady means one who dispenses gifts of hospitality and kindness, there is another reason why she should know the value of her gifts. There is something divine in the contemplation of the allotment of duty to the two sexes: man must work, build up, invent, and acquire, for woman to distribute, administer, and divide.

As for reading, they had a book on the history of England, with the cover off, and wanting the title-page with several chapters. There was one of those still remaining in which the author exhorted his readers (her teachers told the girl that the admonition belonged to women as well as men) never to grow faint or to weary in the defence of their Liberties. She ignorantly confounded the Liberties of the country with the Liberties of the Fleet, and could not avoid the reflection that a woman would certainly put more heart into her defence of the Liberties if these were cleaner, and if there were fewer men who swore and got drunk. There were also a Bible and a Church Prayer-book; there were three odd volumes of 'Sermons;' and

there were besides odd volumes of romances, poems, and other works which Mr. Solomon Stallabras was able to lend.

Mrs. Deborah added to her knowledge of book-keeping some mastery over the sublime science of astronomy. By standing on chairs at the window when the west wind blew the fogs away and the sky was clear, it was possible to learn nearly everything that she had to teach. The moon was sometimes visible, and a great many of the stars, because, looking over the market, the space was wide. Among them were the Pole Star, the Great Bear, Orion's belt, and Cassiopeia's chair. It was elevating to the soul on such occasions to watch the heavenly bodies, and to listen while Mrs. Deborah discoursed on the motions of the planets and the courses of the stars.

'The moon, my dear,' she would say, 'originally hung in the heavens by the hand of the Creator, goes regularly every four weeks round the sun, while the sun goeth daily round the earth: when the sun is between the earth and the moon (which happens accidentally once a month or thereabouts),

part of the latter body is eclipsed : wherefore it is then of a crescent-shape : the earth itself goes round something—I forget what—every year : while the planets, according to Addison's hymn, go once a year, or perhaps he meant once a month, round the moon. This is the reason why they are seen in different positions in the sky. And I believe I am right in saying that if you look steadily at the Great Bear, you may plainly see that every night it travels once about the earth at least, or it may be oftener at different seasons. When we reflect '—here she quoted from recollection—' that these bodies are so far distant from us, that we cannot measure the space between; that some of them are supposed to be actually greater than our own world; that they are probably inhabited by men and women like ourselves ; that all their movements round each other are regular, uniform, never intermittent—how ought we to admire the wisdom and strength of the Almighty Hand which placed them there !'

Then she repeated, with becoming reverence, the words of Mr. Addison, the Christian poet, beginning :

'Soon as the evening shades prevail
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the listening earth
Repeats the story of her birth.
While all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll
And spread the truth from pole to pole.'

In such meditations and exercises did these imprisoned ladies seek to raise their souls above the miseries of their lot. Indeed, one may think there is nothing which more tends to make the mind contented and to prevent repining, than to feel the vastness of nature, the depths and height of knowledge open to man's intellect, the smallness of one's self, and the wisdom of God. And although poor Mrs. Deborah's astronomy was, as has been seen, a jumble; although she knew so little, indeed, of constellations or of planets, that the child did not learn to distinguish Jupiter from the Pole Star, and never could understand (until that ingenious gentleman, who lately exhibited an orrery in Piccadilly, taught her) how the planets and stars could go round the moon, and the moon round the sun, and the sun round the earth, without knocking

against and destroying one another, she must be, and is, deeply grateful for the thoughts which the good lady awakened.

In all things the sisters endeavoured to keep up the habits and manners of gentlefolk. The dinner was at times scanty, yet was it served on a fair white cloth, with plates and knives orderly placed: a grace before the meat, and a grace after.

In the afternoon, when the dinner was eaten, the cloth removed, and the plates washed, they were able sometimes to sally forth and take a walk. In the summer afternoons it was, as has been said, pleasant to walk to the gardens of Gray's Inn. But when they ventured to pass through the market there was great choice for them. The daily service in the afternoons at St. Paul's was close at hand: here, while the body was refreshed with the coolness of the air, the mind was calmed with the peace of the church, and the soul elevated by the chanting of the white-robed choristers and the canons, while the organ echoed in the roof. After the service they would linger among the tombs, of which there are not many;

and read the famous Latin inscription over the door of the cathedral, '*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.*'

'I knew him,' Mrs. Esther would whisper, standing before the great man's monument. 'He was a friend of my father's, and he often came and talked, my sister and myself being then but little, on the greatness of astronomy, geometry, and architecture. In the latter years of his life he would sit in the sunshine, gazing on the noble cathedral he had built. Yet, grand as it is, he would still lament that his earlier plans, which were grander still, had not been accepted.'

Then out into the noisy street again : back to the shouts of chairmen, waggon-drivers, coachmen, the bawling of those who cried up and down pavements, the cries of flying piemen, newsmen, boys with broadsheets, dying confessions, and ballads—back to the clamour of Fleet Market.

Another excursion, which could only be undertaken when the days were long, was that to Westminster Abbey.

The way lay along the Strand, which, when the crowded houses behind St. Clement's and

St. Mary's were passed, was a wide and pleasant thoroughfare, convenient for walking, occupied by stately palaces like Northumberland and Somerset Houses, and by great shops. At Charing Cross one might cross over into Spring Gardens, where, Mrs. Esther said, there was much idle talk among young people, with drinking of Rhenish wine. Beyond the gardens was St. James's Park: Kitty saw it once in those days, being taken by Sir Miles Lackington; but so crowded was it with gallant gentlemen, whose wigs and silken coats were a proper set-off to the hoops and satins of the ladies, that she was ashamed of her poor stuff frock, and bade Sir Miles lead her away, which he did, being that day sorrowful and in a repentant mood.

'I have myself worn those silk waistcoats and that silver lace,' he said with a sigh. 'My place should be among them now, were it not for Hazard. Thy own fit station, pretty pauper, is with those ladies. But Heaven forbid you should learn what they know! Alas! I knew not when I ought to stop in the path of pleasure.'

'Fie!' said she. 'Young men ought not to find their pleasure in gambling.'

'Humanity,' said Sir Miles, becoming more cheerful when the Park was left, 'has with one consent resolved to follow pleasure. The reverend divines bid us (on Sunday) be content to forego pleasure; in the week they, too, get what pleasure they can out of a punch-bowl. I am content to follow with other men. Come, little Puritan, what is thy idea of pleasure?'

That seemed simple enough to answer.

'I would live in the country,' said she readily, 'away from this dreadful town; I would have enough money to drink tea every day (of course I would have a good dinner, too), and to buy books, to visit and be visited, and make my ladies happy, and all be gentlewomen together,'

'And never a man among you all?'

'No—we should want no man. You men do but eat, drink, devour, and waste. The Rules are full of unhappy women, ruined by your extravagances. Go live all together, and carry each other home at night, where no woman can see or hear.'

He shook his head with a laugh, and an-

swered nothing. That same night, however, he was led home at midnight, bawling some drinking song at the top of his voice; so that the girl's admonition had no effect upon him. Perhaps profligate men feel a pleasure not only in their intemperance but also in repentance. It always seemed to me as if Sir Miles enjoyed the lamentations of a sinner the morning after a debauch.

On the few occasions when their journey was prolonged beyond Charing Cross, the ladies were generally attended and protected by Mr. Solomon Stallabras, who, though little in stature, was brave, and would have cudgelled a porter, or cuffed a guardsman, in the defence of ladies, as well as the strongest and biggest gentleman.

There are many other things to see in Westminster Abbey—the coronation throne, Henry the Seventh's Chapel, the monuments of kings, queens, great lords, and noble generals—but Mr. Stallabras had an eye to one spot only.

'There,' he said, 'is the Poet's Corner: with Dryden, Ben Jonson, and the glorious dead of this spot, shall, perhaps, my ashes be

mixed. Ladies, immortality is the poet's meed.'

The poor man needed some solace in these days, when his poverty was excessive. Later on he found a little success: obtained an order for a volume of 'Travels in Cashmere' (whither he had never been), which brought him in eight guineas. He afterwards added 'A Romantic Tale,' the scene of which was laid in the same sweet abode of Sensibility. It was interspersed with verses, as full of delicacy as the tale itself. But the publisher, who gave him five guineas for it, complained afterwards that he had lost by his bargain. Mr. Stallabras often boasted of the great things he could do were there no publishers, and regretted the invention of printing, which rendered this class, who prey upon the very vitals of poor poets, a necessity.

These holidays, these after-hours of rest in the tranquil aisles of St. Paul's, or the awful Gothic shades of Westminster, were far between. Mostly the three sat together over their work, while the tumult raged below.

'Patience, child,' said Mrs. Deborah. 'Patience awhile. We have borne it for nigh

thirty years. Can you, who have hope, not bear it a little longer?'

Said Mrs. Esther: 'Providence wisely orders every event, so that each year or each day shall add something to the education of the soul. It is doubtless for some wise purpose we have been kept in scarceness among runagates and spendthrifts.'

On Sundays they generally went to the church of St. Giles, Cripplegate. It was a long way from the Rules, but the ladies liked it because it was the church where their father lay buried. From the place where they sat in the seats of the poor, which have neither cushions nor backs, they could read the tablet to the memory of the late Joshua Pimpernel, once Lord Mayor of London, and Alderman of Portsoken Ward. The great church was full of City memories, dear to them from their childhood: when they were girls they used to sit in a stately pew with red serge seats and hassocks; now, they worshipped in the same church, but on the benches among the poor women and the children. Yet there was the same service, with the rector and the clerk in their desks,

the schoolboys of the Charity along the left, and the schoolgirls of the Charity along the right; the beadles and vergers, the old women who swept the church, opened the pew doors, curtsied to the quality and remained behind for doles—all brought back their childhood. They were as poor themselves as these old trots, but they could not stay for doles. It is a large and handsome church, filled with grave citizens, responsible men, whose ventures are abroad on many seas, respected for wealth and upright conduct, good men and true, such as was, in his day, my Lord Mayor Pimpernel himself; with the citizens sit their wives bravely attired, and their daughters making gallant show in hoops, patches, lace, sarsnet and muslin. Outside the church a graveyard, piled and full, still with a tree or two upon it, whose boughs in June are covered with bright green leaves, among which the sparrows twitter and fly about. There is also a great round tower of antique look, which once had been part of the Roman wall of London.

Here they went to worship. When the minister came to the words in the Litany—

'*Lord have mercy upon all prisoners and captives,*'

the sisters would catch each other by the hand, and audibly follow the reader in prayer as well as response. For thirty years, for fifty-two Sundays in each year, they had made that prayer in the same words, for most of the time in the same church. Yet what answer ?

Kitty took the prayer, presently, for herself as well. If these ladies were prisoners, why, what was she ? If they might not sleep abroad, and only walk in the streets by permission and license of the law, how was she different from them, since she could not, being but a maid, and young and penniless, go abroad at all without them or some other protection ?

The sight of the leaves in the trees outside ; the fluttering and flying of the sparrows, now and then the buzzing of a foolish bee who had found his way into the church, carried the girl's thoughts away to the quiet place in the country where, between Hall and Vicarage, she had been brought up. Would the sweet country never more be seen ? Was her life to be, like that of these poor ladies, one long prison among reprobates and profligates ?

The summer came on apace : it grew hot in June ; in July it was so hot that they were fain to sit all day and to sleep all night, with open windows. The air was cooler, perhaps, at night, but it was laden with the odours of decaying cabbages, trodden peas and beans, rotten strawberries, bruised cherries, broken gooseberries, with the nauseous breath of the butcher's stall, and the pestilential smell of the poulterer's shop. Moreover, they could not but hear the oaths and ribaldries of those who sat and lounged about the market, staying in the open air because it was warm and because it was cheap. The bulkheads, bunks, booths, stalls, and counters of the market were free and open to the world : a log of wood for a pillow, a hard plank for a bed ; this was the reward of a free and lawless life. On most nights it seemed best to lie with windows closed and endure the heat. Yet closed windows could not altogether keep out the noise, for on these summer nights all the knaves and thieves unhung in this great town seemed to be gathered here, pleased to be all together, a Parliament of rogues, under the pent-houses and on the stalls of the market. And as

in some Roman Catholic countries nuns and monks maintain a perpetual adoration to the Blessed Virgin, whom they ignorantly worship, so did these reprobates maintain a perpetual litany of ribaldry and foul conversation. It never ceased. When one grew tired he lay down and slept: his friends carried on the talk; the drinking-booths were open all night long, so that those who talked might slake their thirst, and if any waked and felt thirsty he too might have a drain and so lie down again. Day and night there was a never-ending riot: the ladies, as the hot days continued, grew thinner and paler, but they bore it patiently; they had borne it for thirty years.

Between two and three in the morning there generally came a little respite; most of the brawlers were then asleep, drunk, or tired out; only at corners, where there was drink to be had, men and women still gathered together, talking and joking. At four, or thereabouts, the market-carts began to arrive, and noise of another kind began.

One morning in July Kitty awoke—it was a hot and close night—just when all the

City clocks were striking three; it was broad daylight; she sprang from bed, and drawing the blind aside a little, looked out upon the market below and the City around. In the clear and cloudless air, before the new day had charged it with a fresh covering or head-piece of smoke, she saw the beautiful spires of St. Bride's, St. Dunstan's, St. Andrew's, St. Mary's and St. Clement's rising one beyond the other into the clear blue sky, their weathercocks touched by the morning sun; on the south, over the river, were visible the green hills of Surrey, the sun shining on their hanging woods, as plain as if they were half a mile away. On the north there were the low hills of Highgate, Hampstead, and Hornsey, the paradise of cits, and yet places most beautiful, wooded and retired. Everywhere, north, west, and south, spires of churches rising up to the heavens, as if praying for the folk beneath. And under her eyes, the folk themselves!

They were human ruins of the past, the present, and the future.

Old men were among them who lay with curled-up limbs, shaking with cold, warm

though the night was, and old women, huddled up in scanty petticoats, lying with tremulous lips and clasped hands. The cheeks both of the old men and the old women were swollen with drink. What was the record of their lives? Some of them had been rogues and vagabonds from the very first, though how they managed to scape the gallows would be hard to tell. Doubtless their backs were well scarred with the fustigations of the alderman's whip, and they could remember the slow tread of the cart behind which they had marched from Newgate to Tyburn, the cruel cat falling at every step upon their naked and bleeding shoulders. Yet what help? They must starve or they must steal; and, being taken, they must be hanged or must be flogged.

Why, these poor old men and poor old women should, had they not missed the meaning of their lives, have been sitting in high places, with the state and reverence due to honoured age, with the memory of a life well fought, hung with chains of gold, draped with cloth of silver and lace. Yet they were here, crouched in this filthy, evil-smelling

place, eyes shut, backs bent, lips trembling, cheeks twitching, and minds hardened to iniquity. Did any of them, perchance, remember how one who knew declared that never had he seen the righteous forsaken or the good man beg his bread?

A dreadful shivering seized the girl. What plank of safety, what harbour of refuge was open to her that she too might escape this fate? What assurance had she that her end might not be like unto the end of these? Truly none, save that faith by which, as Paul hath taught, the only way to heaven itself is opened.

Then there were young men with red and swollen faces, thieves and vagabonds by profession, who found the air of the market more pleasant than that of Turnmill or Chick Street. Yet it was an ominous and suspicious place to sleep in; a place full of bad dreams for thieves, criminals, and debtors, since close at hand was the Fleet Prison, its wards crowded with the careless, who lounged and jested, and the hopeless, who sat in despair; since but a hundred yards from them stood the black and gloomy New-

gate, its condemned cells full of wretches, no worse than themselves, waiting to be hanged, its courts full of other wretches, no worse than themselves, waiting to be tried, sentenced, and cast for execution, and its gaol-fever hanging over all alike, delivering the wards from their prisoners, cheating the hangman, hurrying to death judge, jury, counsel, prisoner, and warders together. But they never think upon such things, these poor rogues; each hopes that while his neighbour is hanged, he will escape. They cannot stop to think, they cannot turn back: behind them is the devil driving them downwards; before them, if they dare to lift their eyes, the horrid machinery of justice with pillory, whip, and gallows. Among them, here and there, pretty boys and girls, lying asleep side by side upon the hard wooden stalls; boys with curly hair and rosy faces, girls with long eyelashes, parted lips, and ruddy cheeks—pity, pity, that when they woke they should begin again the only trade they knew: to thieve, filch, and pick pockets, with the reward of ducking, pumping, flogging, and hanging.

So clear was the air, so bright the morning, that what she saw was impressed upon her memory clearly, so that she can never forget it. The old men and old women are dead; the young men and women are, one supposes, hanged; what else could be their fate? And as for the boys and girls, the little rogues and thieves, who had no conscience and took all, except the whippings, for frolic, are any left still to sleep on hot nights in that foul place, or are all hanged, whipped at the cart-tail, burnt in the hand, or at best, transported to labour under the lash in the plantations?

Sinner succeeds unto sinner as the year follows year; the crop of gallows fruit increases day by day; but the criminals do not seem to become fewer.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE SOUTH SEA BUBBLE MADE TWO WOMEN PRISONERS.

One Sunday evening in the autumn, the market being then quiet, the two ladies and the girl sat round a fire of coal, talking together by its light. The memories of the sisters, by some accident, were carried back to the past, and they told the child the story, of which she already knew a part, how by a great and crying injustice of the law, they had been shut up in prison, for no fault of their own, for nearly thirty years.

'My father's eyes,' said Mrs. Deborah, looking at the portrait over the fireplace, 'seem to rest upon me to-night.'

Mrs. Esther shuddered.

'It is a sign, sister,' she said, 'that something will happen to us.'

Mrs. Deborah laughed a little bitterly. I thought afterwards that the laugh was like that of Sarai, because a thing did happen to her, as will presently be seen.

'Nothing,' she said, 'will happen to you and to me any more, Esther, except more pain and more starvation.'

'Patience, Deborah,' sighed Mrs. Esther. 'We who have borne our captivity for nine-and-twenty years——'

'And seven months,' said her sister.

'Can surely bear it a little longer.'

'We were girls when we came here,' said Mrs. Deborah; 'girls who might have had lovers and become mothers of brave sons—not that you, Kitty, should let your thoughts run on such matters. But there are no honest lovers for honest girls in the Rules of the Fleet.'

'Lovers!' echoed Mrs. Esther, with a heavy sigh. 'Mothers! with sons! Ah, no! not for us.'

'We are old women now, sister. Well, everything is short that hath an end. Let

us take comfort. To earthly prison is a certain end appointed.'

'We came to the gaol, sister,' continued Mrs. Esther; 'two girls, weeping, hand-in-hand. Poor girls! poor girls! My heart bleeds to think of them, so young and so innocent.'

'We shall go out of it,' said her sister, 'with tears of joy. They shall write upon our tombstones, "These sisters thank God for death."'

'What fault, we asked—ah! Deborah, how often we asked it!—what fault had we committed? For what sin or crime of ours did this ruin fall upon us?'

'I ask it still,' said Deborah the impatient. 'I ask it every day. How can they call this a land of justice, when two innocent women can be locked up for life?'

'My sister, we may not kick against the pricks. If laws are unjust they must be changed, not disobeyed.'

Mrs. Deborah replied by a gesture of impatience.

'We were blessed with parents,' said Mrs. Esther, half talking to herself, half to me,

'whose worth and piety were as eminent as their lofty positions in the city. Our respected father was Lord Mayor in the year 1716, when, with our esteemed mother, who was by birth a Balchin, and the grand-daughter of Sir Rowland Balchin, also once Lord Mayor, he had the honour of entertaining his Highness Prince George of Denmark. We were present at that royal banquet in the gallery. Our father was also, of course, an alderman——'

'Of Portsoken Ward,' said Mrs. Deborah.

'And Worshipful Master of the Company of Armour Scourers.'

'And churchwarden of St. Dionis Backchurch,' said Mrs. Deborah.

'Which he beautified, adding a gallery at his own expense.'

'And where, in 1718, a tablet was placed in the wall to his memory,' added Mrs. Deborah.

'And one to the memory of Esther, his wife,' continued the elder sister, 'who died in the year 1719, so that we, being still minors, unfortunately became wards of a merchant, an old and trusted friend of our father.'

'A costly friend he proved to us,' said Mrs. Deborah.

'Nay, sister, blame him not. Perhaps he thought to multiply our fortunes tenfold. Then came the year of 1720, when, by visitation of the Lord, all orders and conditions of men went mad, and we, like thousands of others, lost our little all, and from rich heiresses of twenty thousand pounds a piece — such, Kitty, was then our enviable condition—became mere beggar-girls.'

'Worse,' said Mrs. Deborah, grimly. 'Beggar-wenches are not in debt; they may go and lay their heads where they please.'

'We were debtors, but to whom I know not; we owed a large sum of money, but how much I know not; nor have ever been able to understand how our guardian ruined us, with himself. I was twenty-two, and my sister twenty-one; we were of age; no one could do anything for us; needs must we come to the Fleet and be lodged in prison.'

'Esther!' cried her sister, shuddering; 'must we tell her all?'

'My child,' continued Mrs. Esther, 'we suffered at first more than we dare to tell you. There was then in charge of the prison a wretch, a murderer, a man whose sins

towards me I have, I hope, forgiven, as is my Christian duty. But his sins towards my sister I can never forgive; no, never. It is not, I believe,' she said with more asperity than I had ever before remarked in her—'it cannot be expected of any Christian woman that she should forgive in a wicked man his wickedness to others.'

'That is my case,' said Mrs. Deborah. 'The dreadful cruelties of Bambridge, so far as I am concerned, are forgiven. I cannot, however, forgive those he inflicted upon you, Esther. And I never mean to.'

This seemed at the moment an edifying example of obedience to the divine law. Afterwards the girl wondered whether any person was justified in nourishing hatred against another. And as to that, Bambridge was dead; he had committed suicide; he had gone where no human hate could harm him.

Everyone knows that this man must have been a most dreadful monster. He was the tenant, so to speak, of the prison, and paid so much a year for the privilege of extorting what money he could from the unfortunate

debtors. He made them pay commitment fees, lodging fees, and fees of all kinds, so that the very entrance to the prison cost a poor wretch sometimes more than forty pounds. He took from the two ladies all the money they had, to the last guinea; he threatened them with the same punishment which he (illegally) inflicted on the unfortunate men; he would, he said, clap them in irons, set them in tubs, put them in the strong-room, which was a damp and dark and filthy dungeon, not fit for a Turk; he kept their lives in continual terror of some new misery: they had ever before their eyes the spectacle of his cruelties to Captain Mac-Pheadrid, whom he lamed; Captain Sinclair, whom he confined until his memory was lost and the use of his limbs; Jacob Mendez, whom he kept locked up till he gave up his uttermost farthing; and Sir William Rich, whom he slashed with a hanger and beat with sticks because he could not pay his lodging.

And as everyone knows, Bambridge was at last turned out through the exertions of General Oglethorpe.

> 'And how can I forget the generous band,
> Who, touched with human woe, redressive searched
> Into the horrors of the gloomy gaol?'

'We endured these miseries,' continued Mrs. Esther, 'for four years, when our cousin was able to go security and pay the fees for us to leave the dreadful place and enjoy the Rules. Here, at least, we have some liberty, though we must live among scenes of rudeness, and see and hear daily a thousand things which a gentlewoman should be able to escape and forget. Our cousin,' she went on, after a pause, 'is not rich, and is able to do little for us: he sends us from time to time, out of his poverty, something for our necessities: out of this we have paid our rent, and being able sometimes to do some sewing-work, we have lived, though but poorly. Two women want but little: a penny will purchase a dish of broth.'

'It is not the poverty we lament,' said Mrs. Deborah, 'it is the place wherein we live.'

'Then,' Mrs. Esther went on, 'Heaven sent us a friend. My dear, be it known to you, that had it not been for the doctor, we had, ere now, been starved. He it was who

found us in hunger and cold: he fed us, clothed us, and warmed us.'

'To us, at least, he will always be the best of men,' said Mrs. Deborah.

'More than that, sister; he hath brought us this child to be our joy and comfort: though God in His mercy forbid that your young days should all be wasted in this wicked place, which surely is the very mouth——'

Here they were interrupted by an uproar in the street below us: a bawling and bellowing of many men: they were bringing home the baronet, who was already drunk. Among the voices Kitty heard, and hung her head with shame, the tones of her uncle, as clear and sonorous as the great bell of St. Paul's.

They said nothing for a space. When all was quiet again, and the brawlers had withdrawn, Mrs. Esther spoke in her gentle way.

'A man's life doth, doubtless, seem to himself different from what he seems to the women who know him. We know not his moments of repentance, his secret prayers, or his temptations. Men are stronger than women, and they are also weaker: their

virtues are nobler: their vices are more conspicuous. We must not judge, but continue to think the best. I was saying, my dear, when we were interrupted by the brawling of Sabbath-breakers, that your uncle, the worthy doctor, is the most kind-hearted and generous of men. For all that he has done to us, three poor and defenceless women, we have nothing to give in return but our prayers. Let us give him these, at least. May the Lord of all goodness and mercy reward him, strengthen him, and forgive him whatever frailties do beset him!'

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE DOCTOR WAS AT HOME TO HIS FRIENDS.

If it be true (which doubtless will be denied by no one) that women are fond of changing their fashions and of pranking themselves continually in some new finery, it is certainly no less true that men—I mean young ones — are for ever changing their follies as well as their fashions. The follies of old men—who ought to be grave, in contemplation of the next world—seem to remain the same: some of them practise gluttony: some love the bottle: some of them the green table: some, even more foolish, pretend to renew their youth and counterfeit a passion for our sex. As for the fashions of the young men, one year it is the cocking of a hat, the next it is the colour of a waistcoat,

the cut of a skirt, the dressing of a wig, the ribbon behind must be lengthened or reduced, the foretop must stick up like a horn one year and lie flat the next, the curls must be amplified till a man looks like a monstrous ram, or reduced till he resembles a monkey who has been shaved; the sword must have hilt and scabbard of the fashionable shape, which changes every year; it must be worn at a certain angle; the rule about the breadth of the ruffle or the length of the skirt must be observed. So that, even as regards their fashions, the men are even with the women. Where we cannot vie with them is in the fashion of their amusements, in which they change for ever, and more rapidly than we change the colour of a ribbon. One season Ranelagh is the vogue, the next Vauxhall; the men were, for a year or two, bitten by that strange madness of scouring the streets by night, upsetting constables, throwing pence against window-panes, chasing belated and peaceful passengers, shouting and bellowing, waking from sleep timid and helpless women and children. Could one devise a braver and more noble amusement? Another

time there was the mischievous practice of man-hunting. It was thought the work of a fine fellow, a lad of spirit, to lie hidden, with other lads of spirit, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, or some such quiet place, behind the bushes, until there might pass by some unfortunate wretch, alone and unprotected. Then would they spring to their feet, shouting, 'That's he! that's he! after him, boys!' and pursue the poor man through the streets with drawn swords and horrid cries, until, half dead, he rushed into some tavern or place of refuge. As for actors, singers, or dancers, they take them up for a season, and then abandon them for no merit or fault in them whatever; one day they are all for Church, and the next they applaud Orator Henley; one day they shout for Nancy Dawson, and the next for Garrick; one day they are Whig and the next Tory; one year they brandish thick clubs, wear heavy greatcoats with triple capes, swear, drink porter, and go like common coachmen; the next, with amber canes, scented gloves, laced ruffles, flowered silk waistcoats, skirts extended like a woman's hooped petticoat, they amble along as if the

common air was too coarse for them, mince their words, are shocked at coarse language, and can drink nothing less fine than Rhenish or Champagne, though the latter be seven shillings and sixpence a flask; and as for their walk, they go on tip-toe like a city madam trying to look like a gentlewoman. The next year, again, they are all for Hockley-in-the-Hole and bear-baiting. This year, the fashion was for a short space, and among such as could get taken there, to spend the evenings in the Rules of the Fleet, where, the bloods of the town had discovered, was to be found excellent company for such as liked to pay for it, among those who had been spent and ruined in the service of fashion, gaming, and gallantry.

There are plenty of taverns and houses of call in London where a gentleman may not only call for what he pleases to order, but may also be diverted by the jests and songs of some debauched, idle fellow who lies and lops about all day, doing no work and earning no money, but in the evening is ready to sing and make merriment for a bowl of punch. This rollicking, roaring blade, the

lad of mettle, was once a gentleman, perhaps, or a companion to gentlemen. To him nature, intending her worst, hath given a reckless temperament, an improvident brain, a merry laugh, a musical voice, a genius for mimicry, of which gifts he makes such excellent use that they generally lead him to end his days in such a position. Men need not, for certain, go to Fleet Market to find these buffoons.

Yet, within the Rules, there was an extraordinary number of these careless vagabonds always ready to enjoy the present hour could some friend be found to pay the shot. In the morning they roamed the place, leaned against bulkheads, sat in doorways, or hid themselves within doors, dejected, repentant, full of gloomy anticipations; in the evening their old courage came back to them, they were again jocund, light-hearted, the oracle of the tavern, the jester and Jack-pudding of the feast, pouring out songs from the collections of Tom D'Urfey, and jokes from Browne and Ned Ward.

Many of the taverns, the Bishop Blaize, for example, and the Rainbow, kept one or

two of these fellows in their regular employ. They gave them dinner, with, as soon as the guests arrived in the evening, liberty to call for what they pleased. If the visitors treated them, so much the better for the house; but there were, however, conditions, unwritten but understood: they were never to be sad, never grave, never to show the least signs of repentance, reflection, or shame; and they were not to get drunk early in the evening, or before the better sort of visitors, whose entertainment they were to provide. Shameful condition! shameful servitude, for man (who hath a soul to think of) to obey!

One has to confess with shame that among the tavern buffoons, the professional Tom Fools of the Fleet, were several of those clergymen whose trade it was to make rash couples wretched for life. This peculiarity, not to be found elsewhere, provided, perhaps, a novelty in vice which for a time made the Rules a favourite resort of men about town: the knowledge that the man who without a rag left of the gravity belonging to his profession, laughed, sang, and acted for the amusement of all comers, should have borne himself as a grave

and reverend divine, gave point to his jest and added music to his song. It is not every day that one sees a merry-andrew in full-bottomed wig, bands, and flowing gown; it is not in every tavern that one finds the Reverend James Lands dancing a hornpipe in clogs, or the Reverend William Flood bawling a comic song while he grins through a horse-collar. Nor could the wits find at the coffee-houses of St. James's or Covent Garden, or at any ordinary place of amusement, a clergyman at the head of the table ruffling it with the best—albeit with tattered gown and shabby wig—ready with jest more profane, wit more irreverent, song and story more profligate, than any of the rest.

As for Dr. Shovel, it must not be supposed that he was to be found in any of these places.

'What!' he was wont to cry, 'should a man of reputation, a scholar whose Latin verses have been the delight of bishops and the pride of his college, a clergyman of dignity and eloquence, condescend to take the pay of a common vintner, make merriment for the company of a mughouse, hobnob with a

tradesmen's club, play buffoon for a troop of Templars, and crack jests for any ragamuffin prentice with half-a-crown to call for a bottle? No, sir! The man who would know Dr. Gregory Shovel must seek him in his own house, where, as a gentleman and a scholar, he receives such as may be properly introduced on every night of the year—Sundays excepted, when he takes his drink, for the most part, alone.'

In fact, his house was the chief attraction of the Rules; but access was only granted to those who were brought by his friends. Once introduced, however, a man was free of the house, and might not only come again as often as he pleased, but bring other friends. Now, as men prize most that which is least easy to procure, whether they want it or not, it became a distinction to have this right of spending the evening in the Fleet Market. A fine distinction, truly!

Those, however, who went there were not unlikely to find themselves among a goodly assemblage of wits and men of fashion. The doctor played the host with the dignity of a bishop, and the hospitality of a nobleman;

chairs were set around the table, in that room where he performed his daily marriages ; those who came late could stand or send for a bench from the market; Roger and William, the two clerks, were in attendance to go and fetch the punch which the doctor or his guests provided for the entertainment of all. Tobacco was on the table ; the doctor was in the chair, his long pipe in his mouth, his great head leaning back, his eyes rolling as he talked, before him his glass of punch. He was no buffoon ; he did not cut capers, nor did he dance, nor did he sing Tom D'Urfey's songs, nor did he quote Ned Ward's jokes. If the company laughed, it was at one of his own stories, and when he sang, the words were such as might have been heard in any gentlewoman's parlour, and the music was Arne's, Bull's, Lilly's, or Carey's. Round him were poets, authors, scholars, lawyers, country gentlemen, and even grave merchants ; some of them were out at elbows, threadbare, and sometimes hungry, but they were as welcome as the richer sort who paid for the punch. The younger men came to listen to one who was notorious for his impudent defiance of the

law, and was reported to possess excellent gifts of conversation and of manner. The elder men came to look upon a man unabashed in his disgrace, whom they had known the favourite of the town.

'All the world,' Sir Miles Lackington told me, 'ran after Dr. Shovel when he was a young man and evening lecturer at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields; never was clergyman more popular in the world or in the pulpit; what was to be looked for when such a young man spent his morning with great ladies, who cried, "Oh, sweet sir! oh, reverend sir! how eloquent, how gracious are your words!" but that he should see within reach promise of preferment, and run into debt to maintain a fine appearance and a fine lodging?'

The fine ladies had gone off after other favourite divines; their promises were forgotten; they had listened to other voices as musical, and bowed their heads before other divines as pious. The debts were unpaid—the doctor in the Rules. He possessed no longer the wonderful comeliness with which he had stolen away the hearts of women, he preached no more in any pulpit; but his old

dignity was left, with his eloquence and his wit. He who had charmed women now attracted men.

'Fie!' he would say; 'remind me not of that time. I was once the pet and plaything of ladies, a sort of lapdog to be carried in their coaches: a lackey in a cassock, with my little store of compliments, pretty sayings, and polite maxims: my advice on patches, powder, and Eau de Chypre: my family prayers: my grace before meat: my sermons on divine right and the authority of the Church; and my anecdotes to make my lady laugh and take the cross looks out of little miss's dimpled cheeks. And, gentlemen, withal a needy curate, a poor starveling, a pauper with never a guinea, and a troop of debts which would not disgrace a peer.

'Whereas,' he would continue, 'here I live free of duns and debt: the countesses may go hang: I look for no more patrons: I expect no beggarly preferment; I laugh at my ease, while my creditors bark but cannot bite.'

To those who objected that in former times he preached to the flock, and that his elo-

quence was now as good as lost to the Church, he replied that, as Chaplain of the Fleet, he preached daily, whereas formerly he had preached but once a week, which was a clear gain for righteousness.

'What! would you have me send forth my newly married lambs without a word of exhortation beyond the rubric? Nay, sir; that were to throw away the gift of speech, and to lose a golden occasion. None leave my chapel-of-ease unless fortified and exhorted to virtue by such an admonition as they have never before enjoyed.'

One evening in October, when the summer was over and the autumn already set in, the doctor sat as usual in his arm-chair. Before him stood his tobacco-box, and beside it lay his pipe. As yet, for it was but eight o'clock, there was no punch. Four great wax candles stood lighted on the table, and in the doorway were the two impudent varlets, whom he called his clerks, leaning against the posts, one on either hand.

There was but one visitor as yet. He was a young Templar, almost a boy, pale and thin because of his late hours and his excesses.

And the doctor was admonishing him, being at the time in a mood of repentance, or rather of virtue.

'Young man,' he said, 'I have observed thee, and made inquiry among thy friends regarding thy conduct, which resembles, at present, that of the prodigal son while revelling in his prodigality. Learn from this place and the wretches who are condemned to live in it, the end of profligacy. What the words of Solomon have hitherto been powerless to teach, let the Chaplain of the Fleet enforce. The wellspring of wisdom is as a flowing brook, says the Wise Man. Yet ye drink not of that stream. Also he saith that Wisdom crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city. But ye regard not. He hath told ye how the young man, void of understanding, falls continually into the pit of destruction. But ye heed not. The drunkard and the glutton, he hath declared, shall come to poverty. Ye listen not, but continue to eat and to drink. Wherefore, young man, look around thee and behold this place. We who are here sit among wine-bibbers and spendthrifts: we have not in our comings

and goings—but, alas! we never go—any gracious paths of pleasantness: we go never among the meadows to breathe the air of buttercups and to ponder on the divine wisdom: we listen perpetually to the cackle of fools, the braying of asses, whom we could indeed wish to be wild and on their native Asiatic plains; and the merriment of madmen, which is like unto the crackling of thorns beneath the pot: we have—though our sins are multitudinous as the moments—no time nor opportunity for repentance: and even if we did repent, there is no way out for us, no escape at all, but still we must remain among the wicked until we die. Even the Christian priest, who finds himself (through thoughtlessness over money matters, being continually occupied with higher things) brought hither, must leave the ways which are right, and cleave unto those which are wrong. It is only by lying, bullying, and swearing, that money (by which we live) is drawn here out of the purses of silly and unwary people. Granted that we draw it. What boots it if one's rogues bring in a hundred couples in a month? The guineas melt away like snow

in the sunshine, and nothing remains but the evil memory of the sins by which they were gotten.'

The Templar, astonished at such a sermon from such a man, hung his head abashed. He came to drink and be merry, and lo! an exhortation to virtue. While the doctor was yet speaking, there came a second visitor—no other than Mr. Stallabras, the poet, who came, his head erect, his hand thrust in his bosom, as if fresh from an interview with the Muses. The doctor regarded him for a moment, as one in a pulpit might regard a late-comer who disturbed his sermon, and went on with his discourse:

'This is a place, young man, where gnashing of teeth may be heard day and night by him who has ears to hear, and who knows that the sounds of riot and merriment are but raised to drown despair: to him every song is a throb of agony, every jest rings in his ears like a cry of remorse: we are in a prison, though we seem to be free; we are laid by the heels, though we are said to enjoy the Liberties of the Fleet; we live and breathe like our fellows, but we have no hope for the

rest of our lives; we go not forth, though the doors are open; we are living monuments, that foolish youth may learn by our luckless fate to avoid the courses which have brought us hither. Wherefore, young men, beware! *Discite justitiam moniti.*'

He paused awhile, and then continued:

'Yet we should not be pitied, because, forsooth, we do but lie in the beds that we have chosen. No other paradise save a heaven of gluttony would serve our turn. In the Garden of Eden, should we peradventure and by some singular grace win thither, we should instantly take to wallowing in the mud and enjoying the sunshine: some of us would sit among the pigsties in happy conversation and friendship with the swine: some would creep downstairs and bask among the saucepans before the kitchen fire: some would lie among the bottles and casks in the cellar. Not for such as have come here are the gardens, the streams, the meadows, and the hilltops.'

Then came two more guests, whom he saluted gravely. These were accustomed to the doctor's moods, and sat down to the table, waiting in silence. He, too, became

silent, sitting with his head upon his hand. Then came others, who also found the doctor indisposed for mirth. Presently, however, he banged the table with his fist, and cried out in those deep tones which he could use so well:

'Come, life is short. Lamenting lengthens not our days. Brothers, let us drink and sing. Roger, go bring the bowl. Gentlemen all, be welcome to this poor house. Here is tobacco. Punch is coming. The night is young. Let every man be merry.'

The room was half full: there were, besides the residents and lodgers of the place, young lawyers from the Temple, Gray's Inn, and Lincoln's Inn; poets not yet in limbo; authors who were still able to pay for their lodgings; young fellows whose creditors were still forbearing; and a few whose rich coats and lace betokened their rank and wealth.

The evening began, the doctor's voice loud above all the rest. Half an hour afterwards, when the air of the room was already heavy with tobacco-smoke, Sir Miles Lackington, who usually came with the earliest, arrived, bring-

ing with him a young gentleman of twenty-two years or thereabouts, who was bravely dressed in a crimson coat, lined with white silk: he had also a flowered silk waistcoat, and the hilt of his sword was set with jewels. He was, in fact, one of those gentlemen who were curious to see this jovial priest, self-styled Chaplain of the place where there were so many parsons, who set the laws of the country at defiance with an audacity so splendid. He looked surprised, as if he had not expected so large an assembly.

'Follow me, my lord,' said the baronet, whose jolly face was already flushed, and his voice already thick with wine. 'Come, my lord, let us get nearer the doctor. Gentlemen, by your leave: will you make place for his lordship? Doctor, this gentleman is none other than the young Lord Chudleigh, who hath heard of your eloquence and your learning, and greatly desires your better acquaintance. Rascal Roger, chairs for my lord and myself!'

He pushed his way through the crowd, followed by his guest. The doctor turned his head, half rose; his melancholy mood

had passed away: he was in happy vein: he had sung one or two songs in a voice which might have been heard at Temple Bar: he had taken two or three glasses of punch, and smoked a pipe and a half of the best Virginian; he was in the paradise which he loved. Yet when Sir Miles Lackington spoke, when he named his guest, the doctor's face became suddenly pale, he seemed to totter, his eyes glared, and he caught at the arm of his chair, as if about to be stricken with some kind of fit. His friends, who had never seen those ample and rubicund cheeks other than of a glowing ruddiness, were greatly terrified at this phenomenon.

'The doctor is ill,' cried Solomon Stallabras, starting to his feet. 'Give air—open the windows—let us carry the doctor into the street!'

But he recovered.

'It is nothing,' he said. 'A sudden faintness. The day has been close. Let no one move.' He drank off his glass of punch: the colour came back to his face and the firmness to his legs. 'I am well again. Sir Miles, you are always welcome. Were the

Liberties peopled with such as you, we should be well sped indeed. Quick with the chairs, Roger. I rejoice to see your lordship in this poor house of mine. Had other noblemen of your lordship's rank but kept their word, I should this day have welcomed you in the palace of a bishop. Forget, my lord, that I am not a bishop: be assured that if I cannot bestow the episcopal absolution and benediction which he of London hath ever ready for a nobleman, my welcome is worthy of a prelate, and the punch not to be surpassed even at Lambeth Palace. Sir Miles, you forgot, I think, to make me acquainted with his lordship's noble name.'

'I am the Lord Chudleigh,' said the young man, doubtfully, and with a pleasing blush.

'Again, your lordship is welcome,' said the doctor. 'In the old days when I was young and able to stir abroad in the world, without a creditor in every street and a vindictive dun in every shop (whose revenge in this my confinement has only brought lamentation on every mother's son, because they remain all unpaid), it was my privilege to be much with your noble father. In truth, I knew not that he was dead.'

'My father died two years ago at his country house.'

'Indeed!' The doctor gravely gazed in his guest's face, both still standing. 'Is that really so? But we who live in this retirement hear little news. So Lord Chudleigh is dead. I went upon the Grand Tour with him. I was his tutor, his companion, his friend, as he was kind enough to call me; he was two years younger than myself, but our tastes were common, and what he bought I enjoyed and often chose. There came a time when—but your lordship is young—you know not yet how rank and class separate friends, how the man of low birth may trust his noble friend too much, and he of rank may think the decalogue written for the vulgar. Your father is dead! I had hoped to see him if but once more, before he died: it was not to be. I would have written to him upon his deathbed had I known: I owed him much—very much more than I could hope to repay, yet would I have repaid something. Your father died suddenly, my lord, or after painful illness?'

'He died, Dr. Shovel, after a long and very painful illness.'

'Why, there,' cried the doctor as if disappointed. 'Had I only known there would have been time for half-a-dozen letters. I would I had been with him myself.'

'It is kind of you, sir,' said his lordship, 'thus to speak of my father.'

'Did he—but I suppose he had forgotten—did he condescend to speak of me?'

'Never,' replied Lord Chudleigh; 'at least not to me.'

'There were certain passages in his life,' the doctor went on, thoughtfully, 'of such a kind as recur to the memory of sick and dying men, when the good and evil deeds of our lives stand arrayed before us like ministering spirits and threatening demons. Certain passages, I say, which were intimately associated with myself. Indeed, it cannot be that they entirely perished from his lordship's memory. Since he spoke not of them, let me not speak. I am sorry, my lord, to have saddened you by thus recalling the thought of your dead father.'

'Nay, sir,' said Lord Chudleigh, 'to have met so old a friend of my father's is a pleasure

I did not expect. I humbly desire, sir, your better acquaintance.'

The company during this long talk were mostly standing. It was no new thing to meet a man of rank at the doctor's, but altogether new to have the conversation assume so serious a tone. Everyone felt, however, that the dignity of the doctor was greatly increased by this event.

Then the doctor waved his hand, and resumed his cheerful expression.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'be seated all, I pray. My lord, your chair is at my right. Enough of the past. We are here to enjoy the present hour, which is always with us and always flying from us. We crown it with flowers and honour it with libations: we sing its presence with us: we welcome its coming, and speed its parting with wine and song. So far are we pagans: join with us in these heathen rites wherein we rejoice in our life and forget our mortality. None but poets are immortal. Solomon—Solomon Stallabras, the modern Apollo, the favourite of the Nine, we drink your health and wish the long deferring of your immortality. Let us drink, let us

talk, let us be merry, let us while away the rosy hours.' He banged the table with his fist and set the glasses clinking. Then he filled a glass with punch and handed it to Lord Chudleigh. 'As for you, Sir Miles,' he said, 'you may help yourself. Ah, tippler! the blush of the bottle is already on thy cheeks and its light is in thy eyes. Wherefore, be moderate at the outset. Roger, thou villain, go order another bowl, and after that more bowls, and still more bowls. I am athirst: I shall drink continually: I shall become this night a mere hogshead of punch. So will all this honourable company; bid the vintner beware the lemon and be sparing of the sugar, but liberal with the clove and the nutmeg. This night shall be such a night as the Rules have never before seen. Run, rogue, run!' Roger vanished. 'Let me sing you, my lord, a song of my youth when nymphs and shepherdesses ran in my head more than Hebrew and theology.'

He sang in his rich, full, and musical voice, the following ditty:

'Cried the nymph, while her swain,
Sought for phrases in vain,
"Ah, Corydon, let me a shy lover teach;

Your flowers and rings,
Your verses and things,
Are pretty, but dumb, and I love a bold speech.

'"To dangle and sigh,
To stammer and cry,
Such foolishness angers us maidens in time:
And if you would please,
Neither tremble nor tease,
But remember to woo us with laughter and rhyme.

'"Go, hang up thy crook,
Change that sorrowful look,
And seek merry rhymes and glad sayings in verse:
Remember that Kitty,
Rhymes still unto pity,
And Polly takes folly for better or worse.

'"Come jocund and gay,
As the roses in May,
With a rolling leg and a conquering smile:
Forget not that mirth
Ever rhymes unto worth,
And lucky the lover who laughs all the while."'

'I wrote the song,' said the doctor, when it was the fashion to be sighing at the feet of Chloe. Not that my song produced any impression on the fashion. Pray, my lord, is it the custom, nowadays, to woo with a long face and a mournful sigh?'

Lord Chudleigh laughed and put the question by.

'What do women care for lovers' sighs? I believe, gentlemen, they like to be carried by assault. Who can resist a brave fellow, all fire and passion, who marches to the attack with a confident laugh and a gallant bearing? It is the nature of the sex to admire gallantry. Therefore, gentlemen, put on your best ruffles, cock your hats, tie your wigs, settle the angle of your swords, and on with a hearty countenance.

'I remember, being then in Constantinople, and at a slave-market where Circassians were to be bought, there came into the place as handsome a young Turk as ever you might wish to set eyes upon. Perhaps he was a poet, because when he had the slaves brought out for his inspection, at sight of the prettiest and youngest of them all, he fell to sighing just like an English gentleman in love. Presently there came in an old ruffler of fifty, who, without any sighs or protestations, lugged out his purse and bought the slave, and she went off delighted at having fetched so good a price and pleased so resolute a fellow.'

The doctor continued to pour forth stories of adventure and experience, interspersed with philosophical maxims. He told of courts and cities as he saw them in the year 1720, which was the year in which he made the Grand Tour with the late Lord Chudleigh. He told old tales of Cambridge life. While he talked the company listened, drank, and smoked ; no one interrupted him. Meanwhile he sent the punch about, gave toasts—with every glass a toast, with every toast a full glass—and swore that on such a night no one should pay but himself, wherefore let every man fill up.

'Come, gentlemen, we let the glasses flag. I will sing you another song, written for the good old days of Tom D'Urfey, when men were giants, and such humble topers as ourselves would have met with scant respect.

'Come all you honest topers, lend an ear, lend an ear,
While we drain the bowl and push the bottle round, bottle round ;
We are merry lads, and cosy, cosy here, cosy here ;
Though outside the toil and moil may resound, may resound.

'Let us drink reformation to mankind, to mankind;
Example may they follow from our ways, from our ways:
And whereas to their follies they are blind, they are blind,
Their eyes may they open to their craze, to their craze.

'For the miser all day long hugs his gold, hugs his gold;
And the lover for his mistress ever sighs, ever sighs:
And the parson wastes his words upon his fold, upon his fold;
And the merchant to the ledger glues his eyes, glues his eyes.

'But we wrangle not, but laugh, while we drink, while we drink;
And we envy no man's happiness or wealth, or his wealth:
We rest from toil and cease from pen and ink, pen and ink;
And we only pray for liquor and for health, and for health.

'Then the miser shall, like us, call for wine, call for wine:
And the lover cry for lemon and the bowl, and the bowl:
And the merchant send his clerks for brandy fine, brandy fine;
And the parson with a bottle soothe his soul, soothe his soul.

'And the rogue shall honest grow, o'er a glass, o'er a glass;
And the thief shall repent beside a keg, beside a keg:
And enmity to friendship quickly pass, quickly pass;
While good fellows each to others drink a peg, drink a peg.

'All kill-joy envies then shall disappear, disappear;
Contented shall we push the bottle round, bottle round;
For 'tis cosy, topers all, cosy here, cosy here;
Though outside the toil and moil may resound, may resound.'

Thus did the doctor stimulate his guests to drink. As the night wore on, one by one dropped away: some, among whom were Sir Miles, dropped asleep; a few lay upon the floor. As for Lord Chudleigh, the fiery liquor and the fumes of the tobacco were mounting to his brain, but he was not, like the rest, overpowered. He would have got up and gone away, but that the doctor's voice, or his eyes, held him to his place.

'I am thinking,' said the doctor with a strange smile, 'how your father at one time might have rejoiced to think that you should come here. The recollection of his services to me must have soothed his last moments. Would that I could repay them!'

Lord Chudleigh assured him that, so far as he knew, there was nothing to repay, and that, if there had been, his father's wish would certainly have been to forgive the debt.

'He could not forgive the debt,' said the doctor, laughing. 'It was not in his power. He would have owned the debt. It was not money, however, but a kindness of quite another sort.'

'Then,' said Lord Chudleigh, prettily bowing, 'let me thank you beforehand, and assure you that I shall be proud to receive any kindness in return that you may have an opportunity to show me.'

'Believe me, my lord,' said the doctor, 'I have the will, if not the power: and I shall not forget the will, at least.'

'It is strange,' he continued, 'that he never spoke about his younger days. Lord Chudleigh attracted to himself, between the age of five-and-twenty and thirty, the friendship and respect of many men, like myself, of scholarship and taste, without fortune. He with his friends was going to supply that defect, a promise which circumstances prevented him from fulfilling. The earthen vessel swims merrily, in smooth water, beside the vessel of brass; when a storm rises it breaks to atoms. We were the earthen vessels, he the brazen; we are all broken

to atoms and ground beneath the heel. I, who almost alone survive, though sunk as low as any, am yet not the least miserable, and can yet enjoy the three great blessings of humanity in this age—I mean tobacco, punch, and the Protestant religion. Yet one or two of the earthenware pots survive: Judge Tester, for instance, a fellow whose impudence has carried him upwards. He began by being a clown born and bred. First he was sent to the Inns of Court, where he fell into a red waistcoat and velvet breeches, and so into vanity. Impudence, I take it, is the daughter of Vanity. As for the rest, a few found their way to this classic region, on which Queen Elizabeth from the Gate of Lud looks down with royal benignity; but these are gone and dead. One, I know, took to the road, and is now engaged in healthful work upon a Plantation of Maryland; two were said to have joined the Waltham Blacks, and lived like Robin Hood, on venison shot in the forest, and other luxuries demanded of wayfarers pistol in hand; one I saw not long ago equipped as a small-coal man in blue surplice, his

shoulder laden with his wooden tinder, and his measure twisted into the mouth of his sack; another, a light-weight and a younger son, became a jockey, and wore the leathern cap, the cut bob, the buff breeches, and the fustian frock, till he was thrown and broke his neck. I laugh when I think of what an end hath come to all the greatness of those days. To be sure, my lord paid for all and promised future favours; but we were fine gentlemen on nothing, connoisseurs with never a guinea, dilettanti who could not pay for the very eye-glasses we carried. In the province of love and gallantry every man, beggar as he was, thought himself a perfect Oroondates. We sang with taste; we were charming men, nonpareils. We had the tastes of men of fortune; we talked as if the things we loved were within our reach; we dreamed of pictures, bronzes, busts, intaglios, old china, or Etruscan pateræ. And we had the vices of the great as well as their tastes. Like them we drank; like them we diced; like them we played all night at brag, all-fours, teetotum, hussle-cup, chuck-farthing, hazard, lansquenet. So we lived,

and so we presently found the fate of earthen vessels. Heaven hath been kinder to some of us than we deserve. Wherefore, gentlemen, drink about.' Here the doctor looked round him. 'Gentlemen, I perceive that I have been for some time talking to a sleeping audience. Roger, pour me out another glass. Swine of Circe, I drink to your headaches in the morning. Now, lads, turn all out.'

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THE DOCTOR DISMISSED HIS FRIENDS.

Those of the guests who had not already departed, were sitting or lying asleep upon the floor or on the chairs. The last to succumb had been Lord Chudleigh, not because his was the strongest head, but because he had drunk the least and struggled the hardest not to fall a victim to the punch. Sir Miles had long since sunk peacefully upon the floor, where he lay in oblivion, one of the men having loosened his cravat to prevent the danger of apoplexy. Solomon Stallabras, among whose vices was not included the love of strong drink, was one of the earliest to depart; the young Templar whom the doctor exhorted to virtue early in the evening, was now lying curled up like a child in the

corner, his virtuous resolutions, if he had ever formed any, forgotten. Others there were, but all were crapulous, stupid, senseless, or asleep.

The doctor stood over his victims, victorious. He had taken, singly, more punch than any three of them together; yet there they all lay helpless, while he was steady of head and speech; it was past two o'clock in the morning; the candles, low now, and nearly spent, burned dim in the thick, tobacco-laden air; the walls were streaming with the heat generated by the presence of so many men and so much drink. Roger, with the red nose and pale cheeks, still stood stolidly at the door, waiting for the half-finished bowl and the last orders; beside him, his fellow-lackey and clerk William.

'Turn all out, Roger,' said the doctor.

'Aye, sir,' said Roger.

Both men addressed themselves to the task. They were accustomed to turn out their master's guests in this fashion. First, they lifted the fallen form of Sir Miles, and bore him carefully to his lodging; then they carried out the young Templar and the others

who lay snoring upon the floor, and deposited them upon the stalls of the market outside, where the fresh air of the night might be expected to restore them speedily.

Meanwhile, Roger and William, for their better protection, would themselves watch over them until such time as they should awake, rise, and be ready to be led home with tottering step and rolling gait, for such reward as the varlets might demand.

The doctor's clerks had a hard life. They began to tout on Ludgate Hill and the Fleet Bridge at eight; they fought for their couples all the morning with other touts; in the evening, they waited on the doctor's guests; at midnight, they bore them into the market; there they watched over them till they could be taken home. A hard and difficult service. But there were few of the men about the Fleet who did not envy a situation so well paid; indeed, one cannot but admire the hardness of men to whom a daily fight, with constant black eyes, broken teeth, and bleeding nose, appears of such slight importance in the day's work, as not to be taken into account.

There remained Lord Chudleigh, who had fallen asleep in his chair, and was the last.

'As for this young gentleman, Roger,' said the doctor, 'carry him upstairs and lay him upon my bed; he is of different stuff. Do not wake him, if you can help it.'

Nothing but an earthquake or an explosion of gunpowder could have awakened the young man, so senseless and heavy was he. They bore him up the stairs, the doctor following; they took off his boots, his coat, and waistcoat, put on him the doctor's nightcap, and laid him in the bed.

All finished, the doctor bade them drink off the rest of the punch, and begone.

The doctor, left quite alone, opened the windows and doors, and stepped out into the market. At two o'clock on a cold October morning, even that noisy place is quiet; a west wind had driven away the smoke, and the sky was clear, glittering with innumerable stars. The doctor threw open his arms and took a deep breath of the cold air, standing with his wig off, so that the wind might freshen his brain. Before him he saw, but he took no heed, the helpless forms of his

guests, lying on the stalls; beside them sat, wrapped in heavy coats, his two serving-men, looking like vultures ready to devour their prey, but for fear of their master, who would infallibly cause them to be hanged.

After a few minutes in the open air, the doctor returned to his room; he was sober, although he had taken enough punch to make ten men drunk; and steady of hand, although he had smoked so much tobacco; but the veins on his face stood out like purple cords, his eyes were bloodshot, his great lips were trembling.

He did not go to bed, but lit a fresh pair of candles, and sat in his chair thinking.

His thoughts carried him back to some time of trouble, for he presently reached out his hand, seized his tobacco-pipe, and crushed it in fragments; then he took the glass from which he had been drinking, and crushed that, too, in his great strong fingers.

'I knew not,' he murmured, 'that the villain was dead. If I had known that he was ill, I should have gone to see him, if only to remind him, with a curse, of the past. He is dead; I can never curse him face to

face, as I hoped to do. I did not think that he would die before me ; he seemed stronger, and he was younger. I looked to seek him out at any time, when I wanted a holiday, or when I wanted a diversion. I thought I would take him in his own house, and show him, in such words as only I can command, how mean a creature he was, and what a treacherous cur. Now he is dead. He actually never will be punished at all.'

This reflection caused him the greatest sadness. He shook his head as he thought it over.

'It is not,' he said to himself, 'that I wished to be revenged on him (though doubtless, as men are but frail, that desire entered somewhat into my hopes), so much as that I saw in him a man who, above most men, deserved to be punished. I break the law daily, incurring thereby the penalty of a hundred pounds, which I never pay, for each offence. Yet truly am I less burdened in my conscience than should have been this Lord Chudleigh. And he hath died in honour. In this world one man steals a pig, and receives the approbation of his kind ; another looks over a wall,

and is clapped in gaol for it; one man slaughters a thousand, and is made a duke; another kills one, and is hanged. I am in prison, who never did anything against the law until I came here, nor harmed any except my creditors. My lord, who thought the ten commandments made for creatures of baser blood, and the round world, with all that therein is, only created for his own insatiable appetite, lives in honour and dies—what can I tell?—perhaps in grace; fortified, at least, with the consolations of the Church and the benedictions of his chaplain. So all things seem matter of chance. As Solomon Stallabras says, in one of his fables:

> '"We little flies who buzz and die,
> Should never ask the reason why."'

He yawned; then, struck with a sudden thought, he took one of the candles and softly mounted the stairs. Shading the light with his hand, he looked upon the face of the young man sleeping on his bed. A handsome young man, with regular features strongly marked, delicate lips, and pointed chin.

'Truly,' said the doctor, 'a youth of great

beauty. Another David. He is more handsome than his father, even in those young days when he caressed me to my ruin, and led me on with promises to my undoing. Yet he hath the trick of the Chudleigh lip, and he hath his father's nose. Would that his father were alive, and that it was he and not his son lying here at my mercy! The son is something; out of regard to his father's memory, he shall not get off scot-free. But what is to be done? There is nothing, I think, that I would not do'—his red face grew purple as he thought of his wrongs—'were his father living, and could I make him feel through his son. Nothing, I believe. As I am a Christian man, if my lord were alive this day, I think I could tie a stone round the boy's neck and chuck him into the Fleet Ditch at Holborn Bridge. And yet, what a poor and miserable thing to do! A moment of brutal satisfaction in thinking of the father's agony—an eternity of remorse. But his father is dead; he cannot feel at all any more, whatever I do. If I could'—his face grew dark again, and he ground his teeth—'I believe I could drag

the boy downwards, little by little, and destroy his very soul, to make his father suffer the more.'

He gasped and caught his breath.

'Why,' he murmured, 'what is this? It is well for men that they are not led into temptation. This young lord hath fallen into my hands. Good. What shall I do with him? He knows nothing. Yet he must suffer something. It is the law. We are all under the law. For the third and fourth generation—and he is only the first generation. His children and his grandchildren will have to suffer after him. It is not my fault. I am clearly carrying out the law. He is providentially led here, not that I may take revenge upon the son of my enemy for his father's wrong, but that he might receive chastisement at my hands, being those of the fittest person, even as Solomon was chosen to slay both Joab and Shimei. What then shall I do? The Reverend Gregory Shovel cannot murder the boy; that would be the common, vulgar thought of a Fleet Market butcher or a hodman. Murder? A nauseous thought.'

He took up the candle and stole noiselessly down the stairs, as if the thought had driven him from the place.

When he was back in his own room he began to walk up and down, thinking.

'He is but a boy,' he said, 'a handsome boy; 'twould be a sin to harm him. Yet, being sent here as he is, in a way that can be no other than providential, 'twould be a sin to let him go. How if I make him pay all my debts, and so leave the Liberties and live respectably ever after? Respectably!' he laughed a little. 'Why, who would believe that the great Dr. Shovel could be respectable? The mud of this place, this dwelling beside a ditch, hath entered into my soul as the iron of the chains entereth into the soul of the prisoner. My name is too deeply daubed with the Fleet mud; it cannot be cleansed. And should I give up my place? Should I leave to another the honour I have won and the income I make therefrom? Shall there be another Chaplain of the Fleet while I survive? No; that will never do. How could I live away from this room wherein I wallow day and night?

Here am I at mine ease; here I get wealth; I cannot leave this place.'

He was in great perplexity. He wandered up and down; he was torn between his wrath against the father and his consciousness that it would be a mean and dreadful villainy to take revenge upon the son.

'I must have taken too much punch,' he said, 'thus to be agitated. Punch, like wine, "is a mocker, strong drink is raging." The Christian should forgive; the father is dead; the lad is a handsome lad and may be good. Besides, whatever I do to the boy, his sire will neither know nor feel. I might as well suppose that the legs and heads on Temple Bar feel what is said about them below. I am a fool; yet am I but a man. For such a crime even a saint would feel a righteous wrath. Yet it is cowardly to take revenge upon the son, the committer of the crime having gone to his own place. Yet he *is* that man's son. What then to do?'

He turned the question over a thousand times, yet found no answer. At last a thought came to him. He nodded his head and laughed aloud. Then he sought his arm-

chair, adjusted his ample gown so as to get the greatest amount of comfort out of it, placed his feet upon a stool, and folded his arms.

'I have taken at least a quart of punch more than is good for me. That is most certain. Otherwise I should have known at once what I should do. I have actually forgotten the peculiarities of my own position. Which shows that I am neither so young nor so strong as I have been. Perhaps the system wants a fillip. I will take a dose of Norway tar-water to-morrow. But first, my lord, you shall find out, early in the morning, why I am called the Chaplain of the Fleet.'

CHAPTER XII.

HOW KITTY EXECUTED THE DOCTOR'S REVENGE.

The doctor seldom transacted business before nine o'clock in the morning, unless, as sometimes happened, a spirited apprentice, a lad of mettle, came with his master's daughter, both stealing away at seven, before the master and mistress were up, when she was supposed to be attending morning prayers at church, or helping Molly the maid with the mop, and he was expected to be cleaning out the shop and dressing the window. The ceremony over, they would go home again, but separately, young miss carrying her Prayer-book before her as demure as a kitten, looking as if she had never heard of a Fleet marriage, and was ignorant of the great Dr. Shovel, chaplain, yea, bishop of that

place; while the boy, with brush and broom and watering-can, would be zealously about his master's work when that poor man—his morning dish of chocolate or pint of small ale despatched—appeared in the shop for the conduct of the day's affairs. Afterwards they could choose their own time for declaring what had been done. Thus did the doctor make or mar the fortunes of many a bold prentice-boy.

This morning the doctor awoke from sleep at seven or thereabouts, having in four hours slept off the punch and tobacco in his arm-chair. His face became almost benign in its thoughtful kindliness as he remembered the guest lying asleep upstairs, and what he was about to do for him. He rose, shook himself, opened the windows and doors, and went out into the market, still in his nightcap, carrying his wig in one hand and his silk handkerchief in the other.

The market was already crowded with purchasers, principally those who buy a barrowful of fruit and vegetables, and bawl through the streets until all is sold. But there was a good sprinkling of maids and

housewives buying provisions for the day. The morning was fresh, with a little autumn fog, and the sun shining through it like a great yellow disk; the waggons stood about with their loads of cabbages, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, apples, plums and sloes, waiting till they could be discharged; on the heaped-up piles of fruit and vegetables you could see hanging still the slender threads and cobwebs which are spun every night in autumn time by invisible spiders, and appear in the morning strung with beads of dew.

'Stand aside!' cried the stall-keepers, one and all. 'Make way for the doctor! Don't you see the doctor? Room for the doctor!'

He walked magisterially to the pump, under which he held his bare head for a few moments while a boy pumped the cold water over him. This done, he shook his head, mopped his poll with his silk handkerchief clapped on his wig, and returned to his own house, his robes majestically floating around him.

The market, proud of its doctor, made way for him with salutations and inquiries after his reverence's health.

At the house he found his two runners waiting for him, as fresh—if pale cheeks and red noses can look fresh—as if they had not been up until two o'clock in the morning.

He sent for a pint of small ale, and began to consider what next.

'Roger,' he said, 'canst thou, at the present moment, lay thy hand upon a woman willing to be a bride, either in the prison or elsewhere?'

Roger hesitated.

'It depends, your reverence, on the bridegroom. About Tower steps, for instance, and down Wapping way, there are brides in plenty to be picked up for the asking.'

'Not brides for me, Roger. Think again. I want a bride who wants a husband, and not a sailor's money; who will stick to her husband and make him as happy in his wedded life as you and the rest of mankind are or have been.'

Roger grinned. He was himself a widower, and could be tickled with the joke.

'I think I know the very woman,' he said. 'A young widow——'

'Good,' said the doctor.

'She has been extravagant, and is in debt——'

'Very good,' said the doctor.

'A prisoner in the Fleet; but I can fetch her out in a twinkling, for half-a-crown.'

'Ay—ay,' said the doctor. 'Go on, honest Roger. A widow, extravagant, and in debt. That promises well.'

'Her husband was an honest draper in Gracechurch Street, who lately died of small-pox, leaving her a good business and a thousand pounds in money. She hath already squandered the thousand, wasted the business, and brought herself to ruin. She is comely, and is but thirty years of age; to get out of the Fleet, I think she would marry the——'

'She shall marry better than that, Roger. Go fetch her here: tell her to come and talk with me, and that if she pleases me in her conversation and appearance, she may shortly marry a gentleman.'

'This,' said the doctor, when his man was gone, 'will be a good stroke of business. This shall be his punishment. My lord shall marry this extravagant slut. No paltry common revenge this. Just punishment for the first generation. He will gain a pocketful of debts and a wife who will stick to him

like a leech. Aha!—a city wench—none of your proud city madams, grand enough to be a countess—but a plain tradesman's widow, with no ideas beyond a dish of tea, Bagnigge Wells, strawberries at Bayswater, cakes at Chelsea, or at the best, a night of wonder-gaping at the quality at Vauxhall; a wife of whom he will be ashamed from the very first. This is good business. What a pity! what a thousand pities that his noble father is no more!'

The doctor laughed and rubbed his hands. Then he mounted the stairs again, and entered his bedroom. The lad was still sound asleep; his cheeks less red, and his breathing lighter.

'His head will ache,' said the doctor. 'I fear he is unaccustomed to punch. When he wakes his limbs will feel like lead; his throat will feel like a limekiln; his tongue will be furred like the back of a squirrel; his eyes will be hot and heavy, as if he had a fever; his hand will shake like the hand of a palsied man; he will totter when he tries to walk. Aha! cursed drink! Time was when I, who am now as seasoned as a port-

wine cask, or a keg of Nantz, would feel the same when I awoke after such a night. Age brings its consolations.' He rubbed his hands, thinking that he could now drink without these symptoms. 'I will marry him,' he continued, 'while he is yet half-drunk. When he recovers, it will be time to explain the position of things. Should I explain, or should his wife? Ho! ho! A draper's widow, of Gracechurch Street, to marry the heir of all the Chudleighs!'

He stood over the bed again, and passed his hand lightly over the sleeping boy's cheeks. Something in his look touched the doctor, and his eyes softened.

'Poor lad! I never had a son. Perhaps, if there had been one, things would have been different. He is a very handsome boy. Pity, after all, that he must marry this jade, this extravagant wench who will waste and scatter his patrimony, and likely bring him to shame, when, being so young, so handsome, and so rich, he might have had the prettiest girl in the country—' here he started—'might have had—might have had—can he not have? Is there a prettier girl or a better-bred girl any-

where in the land than Kitty Pleydell? What more can any man want? She is of gentle blood—on one side at least, for the Shovels, it is very certain, do somewhat smack of the soil. Never a Shovel, except the Reverend Gregory Shovel, Doctor of Divinity, who hath risen to greatness. Clods all. Here is a great chance for such a revenge as would have driven the old lord mad, and will be a blessing and a boon to the young lord. Ho! ho! my Lord Breaker of Promises, my Lord Trampler of Dependents, my Lord Villain and Rogue, how likes your lordship that your son should marry my niece? As for you, young spark, I give you a bride so sweet, so fair, so fresh, that by heavens! you ought to woo her for a twelvemonth, and then go and hang your foolish neck by a garter because she would not say yea. Well, well! let us return good for evil—let us still be Christians. Yet no Lord Chudleigh hath deserved to have any benefit at my hands.'

He rubbed his hands: he laughed to himself, his shoulders rolling from side to side: he nodded his head pleasantly at his victim, then he went downstairs again, with grave

and thoughtful mien. He was thinking how best to bring about his purpose.

He found, however, waiting below, Roger, his man. With him there came a woman dressed in shabby finery. She was a woman of about thirty-two years of age, stout, and still comely; she looked about the room as if in search of some one; her face was eager and anxious. When she saw the doctor, she put her handkerchief to her eyes and burst, or pretended to burst, into tears.

'Alas, doctor!' she cried, 'I am truly ashamed to come in such a plight. But I have nothing else to put on. And Roger, good man, says that the gentleman will not wait. Who is the gentleman? Surely not Thomas Humpage, the mercer, who always promised to marry me when my husband should die, and now refuses because, although a warm man, he will not take upon him the burden of my poor debts. Alas! men are ever thus towards us poor women. Pray, doctor, who is the gentleman? Far be it from me to keep the poor man waiting; and indeed, I was ever a pitiful woman, and——'

'You are under a little mistake, madam,'

said the doctor, interrupting her. 'There is no gentleman here asking for you. Roger is an ass, and a pig.'

Roger made no reply. Excess of zeal frequently led him into mistakes. He stared straight before him, and modestly edged away in the direction of the door, so as to be out of reach both of the doctor's fist, the weight of which he knew already, and the lady's nails.

The poor woman's face fell, and real tears crowded into her eyes. Now the doctor was a man who could not bear the sight of a woman crying, so he hastened to soothe her.

'Your case, madam,' he said, 'hath awakened my commiseration. I have sent for you to know whether, should Roger be able to find a suitable husband, you would be willing to take him.'

'Oh, doctor!' she sobbed; 'best of men! If only you can find me a husband, I should be grateful to the end of my days. I would marry anyone—anyone—even Roger.'

Roger swiftly vanished through the door.

'He may be as old as Methusalem, and as ugly as a foreign Frenchman, but I would

marry him—to take my place in the prison and go free once more.'

'Roger,' said the doctor, 'is a great match-maker. He hath persuaded many couples into this room that never thought, when they went out to take the air and see the shops, of coming here. See, now, would the skipper of a merchant-man serve your turn?'

'Doctor, I love a sailor. They make confiding husbands, and they bring home money.'

'Once married, you are free. And then your creditors would have to catch your husband, who, if he is the handy tarpaulin that deserves you, will show them a clean pair of heels off the Nore. Madam, I will do my best. Meanwhile, perhaps a guinea would be of use to you.'

She cried in earnest as she took it. 'Oh, doctor, the debts are not much altogether; a poor two hundred pounds. And a man may always be happy in the prison. There are skittles and beer. But a woman never can. And I would go to see him sometimes—say twice a year.'

She went away weeping. But she stopped

when she saw Roger outside the door, and held a few minutes' eager conversation with him before she returned to her prison. Perhaps he found some simple country lad or sailor who was beguiled into marrying her, only to take upon him her debts, and to lie within four walls instead of her. But indeed I know not.

We had finished our breakfast and were tidying the room: my thoughts were full of the country that morning, because I had dreamed of the old place and the garden with its yellow leaves, the trailing cobwebs, banks covered with branches of mignonette, nasturtium eight feet long, pinks now mostly over, bending their faded heads, and the larkspur, foxglove, Venus's looking-glass, bachelors' buttons, mournful widow, boys' love, stocks, their glory over now, their leaves withering and all run to seed. I was talking about these sweet things with my ladies, when I heard the doctor's voice at the bottom of the stairs, bidding me quickly take my hat and hood and run down to him, for that he needed me for half an hour.

I obeyed, little thinking what was to

follow. He said nothing, but, by a gesture, bade me follow him.

When we came to his house, Roger and William, his two runners, were waiting outside the door, and the room was set out in the usual fashion, in readiness for any who might chance to call.

'You,' said the doctor to the men, 'wait outside until I call you. Stay, fetch a quart of ale at once.'

The ale brought, the men retired and shut the door.

'Kitty,' said my uncle, 'I have long intended to bestow upon thee the greatest good fortune which it is in my power to procure. Thou art a good girl: thou art my sister's child: thou hast shown a spirit of obedience. I have reflected that it is not well for thee to remain much longer in the Rules, and the only way to provide thee with a home elsewhere, is to provide thee with a husband.'

'But, sir,' I said, beginning to be extremely terrified, 'I do not want a husband.'

'So say all young maids. We, child, know what is best for them. I could have found

thee a husband among my friends. Sir Miles Lackington, indeed, spoke to me concerning the matter; he is a baronet. The Lackingtons are an old family; but he hath squandered his fortune, and I cannot learn that any more money will come to him. Besides, he drinks more than is befitting even in a gentleman of title.'

'Oh, sir!' I cried, 'not Sir Miles.'

'No, Kitty'—the doctor smiled benevolently upon me—'I regard thy happiness first. No drunkard shall marry my niece. Mr. Stallabras hath also opened his mind upon thee; he is an ingenious man, with a pretty wit, and if verses were guineas, would be a great catch for thee. But alas! he hath no money, so I dismissed him.'

Poor Solomon! That, then, was the reason of a late melancholy which we had remarked in him. Mrs. Esther took it as caused by the wrestling of genius, and said that the soul within him was too great for the bodily strength.

'But, Kitty,' here the doctor beamed upon me like the sun in splendour, 'I have here—yea, even in this house, the husband of my

choice, the man who will make thee happy. Start not—it is resolved. Child, *obey me.*'

I declare that I was so terrified by the doctor's words, so amazed by his announcement, so spellbound by his words and manner, that I did not dare resist. Had he told me that I was to be hanged, I could not have made an effort to save myself.

'*Obey me,*' he repeated, bending his eyebrows, and looking upon me no longer as a sun in splendour, but as an angry judge might look upon a criminal. 'Stand here—so—do not move; keep thy face covered with thy hood, all but thine eyes. Give me your hand when I ask it, and be silent, save when I bid thee speak. Be not afraid, girl; I do this for thine own good. I give thee a gentleman for thy husband. Thou shalt not leave this place yet awhile, but needs must that thou be married. I return in five minutes.'

He took the jug of beer and climbed the stairs. I meanwhile stood where he had placed me, my hood over my head, in the most dreadful terror that ever assailed the heart of any girl.

Upstairs the doctor awakened Lord Chud-

leigh with some difficulty. He sat up on the bed and looked round him, wondering where he was.

'I know now,' he murmured, 'you are Dr. Shovel, and this is——'

'Your lordship is in the Liberties of the Fleet.'

'My head is like a lump of lead,' said the young man.

'Your lordship was very merry last night, as, indeed, befits the happy occasion.'

'Was I merry? Indeed, I think I was very drunk. What occasion?'

'Drink a little small ale,' said the doctor; 'it will revive you.'

He took a long drink of the beer, and tried to stand.

'So,' he said, 'I am better already; but my head reels, doctor, and my legs are unsteady. It serves me right. It is the first time, and it shall be the last.'

'I hope so, since your lordship is about to undertake so important a charge.'

'What charge?' asked Lord Chudleigh still dazed and unsteady.

'Is it possible that your lordship hath for-

gotten your mistress of whom you would still be talking last night? "The sweetest girl in England—the prettiest girl in all the world—the fairest, kindest nymph"—I quote your lordship.'

Lord Chudleigh stared in amazement.

'The sweetest girl?—what girl?'

'Oh, your lordship is pleased to jest with me.'

'I remember you, Dr. Shovel, whom I came to see last night with Sir Miles Lackington; I remember the punch and the songs; but I remember nothing about any girl.'

'Why, she is downstairs now, waiting for your lordship. You will come downstairs and keep your appointment.'

He spoke in a peremptory manner, as if ordering and expecting obedience.

'My appointment? Have I gone mad? It is this cursed punch of yours. My appointment?'

The doctor gave him his coat and wig, and helped him to put them on.

'I attend your lordship. She is downstairs. Take a little more ale to clear your head: you will remember then.'

The young man drank again. The beer mounted to his brain, I suppose, because he laughed and straightened himself.

'Why, I am a man again. An appointment? No, doctor, hang me if all the beer in your cellar will make me remember any appointment! Where is Sir Miles? He might tell me something about it. Curse all punch, I say. Yet, if the lady be downstairs, as you say, I suppose I must have made some sort of appointment. Let me see her, at any rate. It will be easy to—to——' here he reeled, and caught hold of the doctor's hand.

What a crime! What a terrible wicked thing was this which we did—my uncle and I! I heard the steps on the stairs; I might have run away; the door was before me; but I was afraid. Yes, I was afraid. My uncle had made me fear him more than I feared the laws of my God; or, since that is hardly true, he made me fear him so much that I forgot the laws of my God. I did not run away, but I waited with a dreadful fluttering of my heart.

I held my hood, drawn over my head, with

my left hand, so that only my eyes were visible, and so I kept it all the time.

I saw in the door the most splendid young man I had ever seen; he was richly dressed, though his coat and ruffles showed some disorder, in crimson coat and sash, with flowered silk waistcoat, and sword whose hilt gleamed with jewels. His cheek was flushed and his eyes had a fixed and glassy look; the doctor led him, or rather half supported him. Was this young man to be my husband?

Roger must have been watching outside, for now he came in and locked the door behind him. Then he drew out his greasy Prayer-book, standing by his lordship, ready to support him if necessary.

'So,' he said, 'this is the sweetest girl in all England—hang me if I remember! Look up, my girl: let me see thy face. How can I tell unless I see thy face?'

'Silence!' said the doctor in a voice of command.

I know not what strange power he possessed, but at the sound of his voice the young man became suddenly silent and looked about the room, as if wondering. For myself,

I knew that I was to be married to him; but why? what did it mean?

The doctor had begun the service. My bridegroom seemed to understand nothing, looking stupidly before him.

Roger read the responses.

The doctor did not hurry; he read the exhortation, the prayers, the Psalms through slowly and with reverence; other Fleet parsons scrambled through the service; the doctor alone knew what was due to the Church; he read the service as a clergyman who respects the service ought to read.

'Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?'

The man Roger gave the dazed bridegroom a jog in the ribs.

'Say "I will,"' he whispered loudly.

'I will,' said the young man.

'Wilt thou,' the doctor turned to me, 'have this man to thy wedded husband?'

Roger nodded to me. 'Say "I will,"' he admonished me.

I obeyed; yet I knew not what I said, so frightened was I.

'Who giveth,' the doctor went on, 'this woman to be married to this man?'

The dirty, battered rogue, the clerk, took my hand and laid it in that of the doctor. I was given away by the villain Roger. Then the service went on.

'With this ring'—the man's hand was holding mine, and it was dry and hot; his face was red and his eyes were staring—'with this ring I thee wed; with my body I thee worship; with all my worldly goods I thee endow.'

Consider—pray consider—that when I took part in this great wickedness, I was but a young girl, not yet seventeen years old; that the thing came upon me so suddenly that I had not the sense to remember what it meant; that my uncle was a man of whom any girl would have been afraid. Yet I knew that I ought to have fled.

When my bridegroom held my hand in his I observed that it was hot and trembling; his eyes did not meet mine; he gazed upon the doctor as if asking what all this meant. I took him, in my innocence, for a madman,

and wondered all the more what this freak of the doctor's could mean.

For ring, the doctor drew from his guest's little finger a diamond ring, which was full large for my third finger.

When the service was finished, bride and bridegroom stood stupidly staring at each other (only that still I wore my hood drawn over my face), while Roger placed upon the table a great volume bound in parchment with brass clasps.

'This, my lord, is our Register,' said the doctor, opening it at a clean page. 'Sign there, if you please, in your usual hand. I will fill in the page afterwards.'

He took the pen and signed, still looking with wondering eyes.

'Now, child,' said the doctor, 'do you sign here, after your husband. The certificate you shall have later. For the present, I will take care of it. Other practitioners of the Fleet, my lord,' he said, with professional pride, as he looked at his great volume, 'would enter your name in a greasy pocket-book and give your wife a certificate on unstamped paper. Here you have a register fit

for a cathedral, and a certificate stamped with no less illustrious a name than the Archbishop of Canterbury. Your lordship hath signed your name in a steady and workmanlike fashion, so that none henceforth shall be able to malign your conduct on this day; they shall not say that you were terrified, or bribed, or were in a state of liquor on the day of your marriage; all is free and above suspicion. I congratulate your lordship on this auspicious occasion. Roger, your mark here as witness. So. It is customary, my lord, to present the officiating clergyman, myself, with a fee, from a guinea upwards, proportionate to the rank and station of the happy bridegroom. From your lordship will I take nothing for myself; for the witness I will take a guinea.'

Here the bridegroom pulled out his purse and threw it on the table. He spoke not a word, however; I think his brain was wandering, and he knew not what he did. Yet he obeyed the voice of the doctor, and fell into the trap that was set for him, like a silly bird allured by the whistle of the fowler. I am certain that he knew not what he did.

The doctor pulled one guinea from the purse, and handed it back to the owner.

'Roger,' he said, 'go drink his lordship's health; and hark ye—silence. If I hear that you have told of this morning's doings, it shall be the worst day in all your life. I threaten not in vain. Go!'

Then the doctor took up the tankard of ale which stood in the window-seat.

'Your health, my lord;' he drank a little and passed it to his lordship, who drained it; and then, with a strange, wild look, he reeled to the doctor's arm-chair and instantly fell fast asleep.

'Your husband is not a drunkard, Kitty, though this morning he appears in that light.'

'But am I married?' I asked.

'You are really married. You are no longer Kitty Pleydell: you are Catherine, Lady Chudleigh. I wish your ladyship joy.'

I stared at him.

'But he does not know me; he never saw me,' I remonstrated.

'That he does not know you yet is very true,' replied the doctor. 'When the fitting

time comes for him to know you, be sure that I will remind him. For the present he shall not know whom he has married.'

'I perceive,' he went on, seeing that I made no reply, 'that thou art a good and obedient child. Ask no questions of me. Say not one word to anyone of this day's work. Be silent, and thou shalt have thy reward. Remember—*be silent*. Now, go, child. Go, Lady Chudleigh.'

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW LORD CHUDLEIGH WOKE OUT OF SLEEP.

Alas! there was small pride in that thought. What joy of being Lady Chudleigh, when I had to pick my way home through the dirty and crowded market, thinking of the pain and grief this wicked thing would cause my ladies when they learned it, of the shame with which my father's soul would have been filled had he known it, and the wrath of Lady Levett when she should hear it! 'Oh, Kitty!' I thought, 'how miserably art thou changed in four short months! In the happy fields at home, everything (save when the rustics swore at their cattle) breathed of religion and virtue; in this dreadful place, everything leads to profligacy and crime. And what a crime! And the poor young

gentleman! Did ever anyone hear the like, that a young girl, not yet quite seventeen, should thus consent to marry a man whom she had never seen! Oh, shame and disgrace! And that young man, so handsome and so gallant, albeit so tipsy that he could scarcely stand. Who would have thought, four months ago, that Kitty would be that wicked creature?' Afterwards, I thought of the dreadful wickedness of marrying while still in mourning for a father not yet six months dead. But I confess that at first, so confused was I, that this thought did not oppress me. Indeed, there was almost too much to think about. Suppose I was, by a careless word, to reveal the secret? Suppose the rascal Roger were to tell it abroad in the market! Suppose the young man (whose name I did not dare to pronounce) were to see me, and find my name! Suppose the doctor were at once to reveal to my—husband, I suppose I ought to call him—who and what I was! All these thoughts, I say, crowded into my mind together, and filled me with repentant terrors.

I went straight home, because there was

no other place to go to. Mrs. Deborah reminded me, when I had taken off my hood, that we were still engaged upon the long outstanding account between Richard Roe, gentleman, and Robert Doe, draper. It was one of the problems of the Book-keeping Treatise, how rightly to state this account to the satisfaction both of Doe (who wanted all he could get), and of Roe (who wanted to pay as little as possible). I remember that Richard Roe had not only bought extraordinary things (for a gentleman), such as ladies' hoops and paniers, but had bought them in immense quantities, to be explained, perhaps, by the supposition that he was a benefactor to the female sex, or perhaps that he was shipping things to Madagascar, where I believe a sarsnet pinner, if in scarlet, is considered worth a diamond as big as a pigeon's egg; and a few bottles of eau de Chypre are thought a bargain, if purchased by a ruby weighing a pound or so.

We had been engaged for a month upon a statement of the account showing the exact liabilities of Richard Roe (who used to pay in odd sums, with pence and farthings, at

unexpected times); we never got it right, and then we began again. Fortunately, it costs nothing to clean a slate.

I sat down to this task with listless brain. What girl, after being so suddenly hurled into matrimony, with the possession of so great a secret, could take any interest in the debts of Richard Roe? The figures got mixed; presently, I was fain to lay the slate aside, and to declare that I could do no more that day.

Nor, indeed, could I do anything—not even hear what was said, so that my ladies thought I was sickening for some fever; which was not improbable, fever being rife at this time, owing to the smell from the vegetables, and one of the little Dunquerques in our own house down with it. Ah! could they only have guessed the truth, what sorrow and pity would have been theirs, with what righteous wrath at the sin!

When I was gone, the doctor called back Roger, and they carried the unhappy bridegroom again to the bedroom, where they laid him on the bed and then left him to himself.

'He will sleep,' said the doctor, experienced in these cases, 'until the afternoon. Have a cup of mutton-broth for him when he wakes, with a pint of small ale.'

Then he returned, and the ordinary business of the day began. The couples came in—half-a-dozen of them. One pair gave him five guineas. They were an Irishman, who thought he was marrying a rich widow; and a woman head over ears in debt, who thought she was marrying a wealthy squire. A week afterwards the unhappy bridegroom came to the doctor to undo the match, which was impossible. He escaped his wife's creditors, however, and took to the road, where, after many gallant exploits, he was caught, tried, and hanged at Tyburn, making a gallant and edifying end, and ruffling it bravely to the very foot of the ladder. The day, therefore, was profitable to the doctor.

'Well begun, Roger,' he said, 'is well done. The morning's work is worth ten guineas. I would rest this afternoon; wherefore, bring no more couples. Yet one would fain not disappoint the poor creatures. Let them come, then, Roger. We may not weary in

well-doing. And, hark ye, take this guinea to Mistress Dunquerque—not the captain, mind—and bid her spend it for the children; and inquire whether Mr. Stallabras hath paid his rent lately; if not, pay it; and buy me, on Ludgate Hill, a hat and feathers for Miss Kitty; and, varlet! if thou so much as breathe of what was done here this morning —I threaten not, but I know the history of thy life. Think of the past; think of Newgate, close by; and be silent as the grave.'

At three o'clock in the afternoon, when the doctor, after his dinner, sat over a cool pipe of Virginia, Lord Chudleigh came downstairs. He was dressed and in his right mind, although somewhat flushed of cheek and his hand shaky.

'Dr. Shovel,' he said, 'I thank you for your hospitality, and am sorry that I have abused it. I am ashamed to have fallen into so drunken and helpless a condition.'

'Your lordship,' said the doctor, rising and bowing, 'is welcome to such hospitality as this poor house of a prisoner in the Liberties of the Fleet can show a nobleman of your rank. I am the more bound to show this

welcome to your lordship, because, for such as is my condition, I am beholden to the late Lord Chudleigh.'

This was a speech which might have more than one meaning. His lordship made no answer, staring in some perplexity, and fearful that the punch might still be in his head.

'It was in this room,' he said presently, 'that we drank last night. I remember your chair, and these walls; but I remember little more. Fie, doctor! your way of treating guests is too generous. Yet I have had a curious and uneasy dream. Those books'—he pointed to the Register and the Prayer-book—'were those upon the table last night? They were in my dream—a very vivid and real dream. I thought I was standing here. Your man was beside me. Opposite to me was a girl, or woman, her face and figure covered with a hood, so that I knew not what she was like. Then you read the marriage-service, drew the ring from off my finger, and placed it upon hers. And you pronounced us man and wife. A strange and interesting dream!'

'What was the ring, my lord?'

'A diamond ring, set round with seven pearls; within, the crest of my house, and my initials.'

'Let me see the ring, my lord.'

He changed colour.

'I cannot find it.'

'My lord, I know where is that ring.' The doctor spoke gravely, bending his great eyebrows. Lord Chudleigh was a man of fine presence, being at least five feet ten inches in height, without counting the heels of his boots and the foretop of his wig. Yet the doctor, whose heels were thicker and his toupee higher, was six feet two without those advantages. Therefore he towered over his guest as he repeated:

'I know where to find that ring!'

'You cannot mean, doctor——' cried Lord Chudleigh, all the blood flying to his face.

'I mean, my lord, simply this, that at eight o'clock this morning, or thereabouts, you rose, came downstairs, met a young lady who was waiting for you, and were by me, in presence of trustworthy witnesses, duly and properly married.'

'But it was a dream!' he cried, catching at the table.

'No dream at all, my lord. A fact, which you will find it difficult to contradict. Your marriage is entered in my Register; I have the lines on a five-shilling stamp. I am an ordained minister of the Church of England; the hours were canonical. It is true that I may be fined a hundred pounds for consenting to perform the ceremony; but it will be hard to collect that money. Meanwhile, those who would inflict the fine, would be the last to maintain that sacerdotal powers, conferred upon me at ordination, can suffer any loss by residence in the Rules of the Fleet. Ponder this, my lord.'

'Married!' cried Lord Chudleigh. 'Married? It is impossible.'

'Your dream, my lord, was no dream at all, but sober truth, believe me.'

'Married?' he repeated.

'Married,' said Dr. Shovel. 'I fear that your state of mind, during the performance of the ceremony, was not such as a clergyman could altogether wish to see. Still, who am I, to decide when a gentleman is too drunk to marry?'

'Married! Oh this is some dreadful dream! Where is my bride? Show me my wife!'

'She is gone, Lord Chudleigh.'

'Gone! Where is she gone?'

The doctor shook his head for an answer.

'Who is she? What is her name? How came she here?'

'I am sorry that I cannot answer your lordship in these particulars. She came—she was married—she went away! In her own good time she will doubtless appear again.'

'But who is she?' he repeated. 'What is she like? Why did she marry me?'

'Why did your lordship marry her? That, methinks, would be the proper question.'

'Show me your Register, man!' Lord Chudleigh was sober enough now, and brought his fist down upon the table in peremptory fashion. 'Show me your Register and your certificate!'

'Ta! ta! ta!' cried the doctor. 'Softly, young man, softly! We are not used to threats in this chapel-of-ease, where I am archbishop, bishop, and chaplain, all in one. For the register, it is securely locked up; for

the certificate, it is perhaps in the hands of Lady Chudleigh.'

'Lady Chudleigh!'

'Perhaps her ladyship hath consigned it to my keeping. In either case, you shall not see it.'

'This is a conspiracy,' cried Lord Chudleigh. 'I have been deceived by rogues and knaves! This is no true marriage.'

'You would say that I am lying. Say so, but, at your peril, *think* so. You are as truly married as if you had been united in your own parish church, by your own bishop. Believe that, for your own safety, if you believe nothing else. At the right time, her ladyship will be revealed to you. And remember, my lord'—here the doctor, towering over him, shook his great fore-finger in warning or menace—'should you attempt another marriage in the lifetime of your present wife, you shall be brought to your trial for bigamy as sure as my name is Gregory Shovel. Laws, in this country, are not altogether made for the punishment of the poor, and even a peer may not marry more than one woman.'

'I will have this wickedness exposed,' cried his lordship, hotly.

'Alas! my lord,' said the doctor, 'the name of Gregory Shovel is already well known. I am but what your father caused me to be.'

'My father! Then there is revenge. . . . The benefits which my father conferred upon you——'

'They were greater than any I can confer upon you. He kept me with him as his private jester. I found him wit: he fed me upon promises. He turned me forth, to be flung into a debtor's prison. That, however, was nothing. Your lordship will own'—here the doctor laughed, but without merriment—'that I have returned good for evil; for, whereas your father robbed me of a wife, I have presented you with one.'

'O villain!' cried my lord. 'To revenge the wrongs of the father upon the son—and this wretch continues to wear the gown of a clergyman!'

'Say what you please. So rejoiced am I with this day's work that I allow you to cast at me what names come readiest to your

tongue. But remember that curses sometimes come home.'

'Where is my wife, then?' he demanded furiously.

'I shall not tell you. Meantime, choose. Either let this matter be known to all the world, or let it remain, for the present, a secret between you and me. As for the lady, she will be silent. As for the rogue, my clerk, if he so much as breathes the secret to the cabbage-stalks, I have that which will hang him.'

'I want to see the woman who calls herself my wife,' he persisted.

'That shall you not. But perhaps, my lord, you would like to go home to St. James's Square with such a wedding-party as we could provide for you: a dozen of Fleet parsons fuddled; the bride's friends, who might be called from their stalls in the market; the music of the butchers, with salt-boxes, marrow-bones, and cleavers; the bride herself. Look out of the window, my lord. Which of the ragged baggages and trollops among the market-women most takes your lordship's fancy?'

Lord Chudleigh looked and shuddered.

'Go your way,' the doctor went on, 'and always remember you have a spouse. Some day, for the better glorifying of your noble name, I will produce her. But not yet. Be under no immediate apprehension. Not yet. At some future time, when you are happy in the applause of a nation and the honours of a sovereign, when your way is clear before you and your conscience gives you the sweet balm of approbation, when you have forgotten this morning, we shall come, your wife and I, with "Room for my Lady Chudleigh! Way there for her ladyship and Dr. Gregory Shovel from the Rules of the Fleet!"'

'Man,' replied Lord Chudleigh, 'I believe you are a devil. Do what you will; do your worst. Yet know that the woman may proclaim her infamy and your own; as for me, I will not speak to her, nor listen to her, nor own her.'

'Good!' said the doctor, rubbing his hands. 'We talk in vain. I now bid farewell to your lordship. Those convivial evenings which you desired to witness will still continue. Let me hope to welcome your lord-

ship again on the scene of your unexpected triumphs. Many, indeed, is the man who hath come to this house single and gone out of it double; but none for whom awaits a future of such golden promise. My most hearty congratulations on this auspicious and joyful event! What can come out of this place but youth, beauty, birth, and virtue? And yet, my lord, there is one singularity in the case. One moment, I pray'—for Lord Chudleigh was already outside the door—'you are the only man I ever knew who spent his honeymoon—alone!'

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW MRS. DEBORAH WAS RELEASED.

No one would be interested to read more of my shame and repentance at that time; nor does it help to tell how the doctor was asked by my ladies if I was subject to any kind of illness for which I might be sickening. The reply of the doctor to them, and his private admonitions to myself, may be partly passed over; it was true, no doubt, as he said while I trembled before him, that a young girl, ignorant and untaught, would do well to trust her conscience into the spiritual direction of a regularly ordained clergyman of the Church of England like himself. As for the marriage, I was to remember that it was done and could not be undone. He hung round my neck by a black ribbon the diamond

ring, my wedding ring, by which to keep my condition ever before myself; to be sure it was not likely that I should forget it, without the glitter and sparkle of the brilliants, which I used to look at night and morning in secret. What did he think of me, this husband of mine, the young man with the handsome face, the white hands, and the fixed, strange eyes? Did he, night and morning, every day curse his unknown wife?

'Let him curse,' said the doctor. 'Words break no bones; curses go home again; deeds cannot be undone. Patience, Kitty! before long thou shalt be confessed by all the world, the Lady Chudleigh. Come, cheer up, child!' he concluded kindly. 'As for what is done, it is done. Partly I did it to clear off an old score, whereof I may perhaps tell thee at another time, and partly for thy honour and glory. Thy father, Kitty, was proud of his name and family, though he married my sister, the daughter of a tenant farmer; but never a Pleydell yet has been lifted up so high as thou shalt be: while as to the Shovels, I am myself the only great man they have yet sent into the world, and they

are not likely to go beyond the Chaplain of the Fleet.'

Then he held up his great forefinger, as long and thick as a school ruler, bent his shaggy eyebrows, and pushed out his lips.

'Remember, child, silence! And go no more moping and sorrowful, because thou shalt soon sit in thine own coach, with the world at thy feet, singing the praises of the beautiful Lady Chudleigh. Such a girl as my Kitty for Sir Miles Lackington? Why, he hath eyes for the beauty of a glass of Bordeaux—he hath sense to rejoice over a bowl of punch; but from Helen of Troy or Cleopatra of Egypt he would turn away for a bottle of port. Or Stallabras, now—should such a creature as he presume to think of such a woman? Let poets sing of women at a distance—the farther off the better they sing—that is right. Why, child, such curls as thine, such roses of red and white, such brown eyes, such lips and cheek and chin, such a figure as thou canst show to dazzle the eyes of foolish boys—Lord Chudleigh should go on his knees before me in gratitude

and transport. And, believe me, some day he will.'

We are all alike, we women. Call us beautiful, and you please us. It was almost the first time that anyone had called me beautiful save Sir Miles Lackington when in his cups, or Solomon Stallabras in his poetic way. Yet every pretty girl knows that she is pretty. There are a thousand things to tell her: the whispers of the women, the sidelong looks of the folk in the streets, the envy of envious girls, the praise of kindly girls, her glass, the deference paid by men of all classes and all ages to beauty, the warnings of teachers, nurses, governesses and matrons that beauty is but skin deep, virtue is better than looks, handsome is as handsome does, 'tis better to be good than pretty, comeliness lasts but a year, while goodness lasts for ever, and so on—all these things make a girl on whom heaven has bestowed this most excellent gift of beauty know quite as well as other people what she possesses, though she knows not yet the power of the gift.

'You are pretty, child,' said Mrs. Esther

to me on the very same day as the doctor. 'You will be a beautiful woman.'

'Which is no good to a girl in the Rules,' said Mrs. Deborah, 'but rather a snare and a danger.'

'Nay, sister,' said Mrs. Esther, 'it is a consolation to be beautiful. You, dear, when we were thirty years younger, were beautiful enough to melt the heart even of the monster Bambridge.'

'A beautiful face and person,' Mrs. Deborah added, with a smile on her poor face as she thought of the past, 'should belong to a good and virtuous soul. In the better world I have no doubt that the spirits of the just will arise in such beauty of face and form as shall be unto themselves and their friends an abiding joy.'

Let us think so; when I die it may be a consolation to me that a return to the beauty of my youth is nigh at hand. I am but a woman, and there is nothing in the world—except the love of my husband and my children—that I think more precious than my past beauty.

Soothed, then, by my uncle's flatteries,

comforted by his promises, and terrified by his admonitions, I fell in a very few days into the dreams by which youth beguiles the cares of the present. My husband, Lord Chudleigh, would go his own way and never ask after me; I should go mine as if he did not exist; some time or other we should leave the Liberties of the Fleet, and go to live near Lady Levett and my dear Nancy. As for the coronet and the rank, I was too ignorant to think much about them. They were so high above me, I knew so little what they meant, that I no more thought of getting them than of getting David's harp and crown. I waited, therefore, being a wife and yet no wife, married and yet never seen by my husband; sacrificed to the wrath of the doctor, as that poor Greek maiden in the story told me by my father, murdered at Aulis to appease the wrath of a goddess.

Two events happened which, between them, quite drove the marriage out of my mind, and for awhile made me forget it altogether.

The first of these was the illness of Mrs. Deborah.

There was fever about the market, as I have said; one of the little girls of Mrs. Dunquerque, in our house, was laid down with it. In autumn there was always fever in the place, caused, my ladies said, by the chill and fog of the season, by the stench of the vegetables and fruit of the market, and perhaps by the proximity of Newgate, where gaol fever was always cheating the gallows. One day, therefore, Mrs. Deborah lay down, and said she would rather not get up again any more. She would not eat, nor would she have any medicine except a little tar-water which seemed to do her no good. When she got very ill indeed, she consented to see an apothecary; he prescribed blood-letting, which, contrary to expectation, made her only weaker. Then we went to the old woman who kept a herb shop at the other end of Fleet Lane, and was more skilful than any physician. She gave us feverfew, camomile, and dandelion, of which we made hot drinks. As the patient grew worse instead of better, she made an infusion of shepherd's-purse, pennycress, and pepperwort, to stimulate the system; she brought

a tansy-pudding, which poor Mrs. Deborah refused to eat; and when gentian water failed, the old woman could do no more.

On the fifth day, Mrs. Deborah gave herself up, and contemplated her end in a becoming spirit of cheerfulness. She comforted her sister with the hope that she, too, would before long join her in a world 'where there is no noise, my dear, no fighting, no profane swearing, no dirt, no confusion, no bawling, no starving, no humiliation. There shall we sit in peace and quiet, enjoying the dignity and respect which will be no doubt paid to two Christian gentlewomen.'

'I might have known it,' sighed poor Mrs. Esther in her tears. 'Only a week ago a strange dog howled all night below our window. I should have known it for a warning, sent for you, my dear, or me, or for Kitty. It cannot have been meant for Sir Miles, for the poor gentleman, being in his cups, would not notice it: nor to Mr. Stallabras, for he sets no store by such warnings.'

'It was for me,' said Mrs. Deborah with

resignation, while Mrs. Esther went on recollecting omens.

'Last night I heard the death-watch. Then indeed, sister, I gave you up.'

'It was a message for me,' said the sick woman, as if she had been Christiana in the story.

'And this morning I heard a hen crow in the market—a hen in a basket. Alas! who can have any doubt?'

'It is but six weeks,' said Mrs. Deborah, feebly, 'since a hearse on its way to a funeral stopped before our door. I remember now, but we little thought then, what *that* meant.'

'I saw, only a fortnight ago,' continued Mrs. Esther, 'a winding-sheet in the tallow. I thought it pointed at Kitty, but would not frighten the child. Sister, we are but purblind mortals.'

Far be it from me to laugh at beliefs which have so deep a root in Englishwomen's hearts: nor is it incredible to those who believe in the divine interference, that signs and warnings of death should be sent beforehand, if only to turn the thoughts heavenward and lead sinners to repent. But this I

think, that if poor Mrs. Deborah had not accepted these warnings for herself, she might have lived on to a green old age, as did her sister. Being, therefore, convinced in her mind that her time was come, she was only anxious to make due preparation. She would have been disappointed at getting well, as one who has packed her boxes for a long journey, but is told at the last moment that she must wait.

As she grew weaker, her brain began to wander. She talked of Bagnigge Wells, of Cupid's Garden, the entertainments of her father's company, and the childish days when everything was hopeful. While she talked, Mrs. Esther wept and whispered to me :

'She was so pretty and merry! Oh! child, if you could have seen us both in our young days—if you could have seen my Deborah with her pretty saucy ways ; her roguish smile, her ready wit made all to love her! Ah! me—me—those happy days! and now! My dear Deborah, it is well that thou shouldst go.'

This was on the morning of Mrs. Deborah's last day in life. In the afternoon her senses

returned to her, and we propped her up, pale and weak, and listened while she spoke words of love and farewell to be kept sacred in the memory of those who had to go on living.

'For thirty years, dear sister,' she murmured, while their two thin hands were held in each other's clasp—'for thirty years we have prayed daily unto the Lord to have pity upon all prisoners and captives, meaning, more especially, ourselves. Now, unto me hath He shown this most excellent mercy, and calleth me away to a much better place than we can imagine or deserve. I had thought it would be well if He would lead us out of this ward to some place where, in green lanes and fields, we might meditate for a space in quiet before we died. I should like to have heard the song of the lark and seen the daisies. But God thinks otherwise.'

'Oh, sister—sister!' cried Mrs. Esther.

'"There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain,"' said Mrs. Deborah. 'Kitty, child,' she turned her pale face to me, 'be kind to my sister.'

We wept together. Outside there was the usual tumult of the market—men buying and selling, with shouts and cries; within, three women weeping, and one dying.

'Go, dear,' said she who was dying; 'call the doctor. He hath been very generous to us. Tell him I would receive the last offices from his hands.'

The doctor came. He read the appointed service in that deep voice of his, which was surely given him for the conversion of the wicked. The tears streamed down his face as he bent over the bed, saying in the words of the Epistle appointed: '"My daughter, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him. For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth; and scourgeth every child whom He receiveth."'

In the evening the poor lady died, being released from her long imprisonment by that Royal Mandate, the Will of God.

We buried her in the green and pleasant churchyard of Islington. It is a sweet spot, far removed from the noise of London; and though her poor remains feel nothing, nor

can hear any more the tumult of crowds, it is good to think that round her are no streets, only the few houses of the village. She lies surrounded by fields and trees; the daisies grow over her grave, the lark sings above the church: she is at rest and in peace.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW MRS. ESTHER WAS DISCHARGED.

After poor Mrs. Deborah's death my lessons came to a sudden stop, and have never been resumed. Some of that perspicacity of style which I have often admired in our modern divines might have fallen to my lot, to enrich this narrative, had I continued in my course of single and double book-keeping.

'I am not clever,' said Mrs. Esther, 'like Deborah. She was always the clever one as well as the beauty. That gave her a right to her little tempers, poor dear. I cannot teach astronomy, because one star is to me exactly like another. Nor do I know aught about book-keeping, except that it is a very useful and necessary science. Therefore, Kitty, thou must go untaught. For that matter,

I think you know as much as a woman need ever know, which is to read, to write—but one ought not to expect of a woman such exactness in spelling as of a scholar—and to cipher to such a moderate degree as may enable her to add up her bills. But it grieves me to think you are growing up so tall and straight without learning how to make so much as a single cordial, or any strong waters. And with our means, what chance of teaching you to toss a pancake, fold an omelette, or dish a Yorkshire pudding?'

It was then that we began to console ourselves for my ignorance, our troubles, and even, I bear mind, for our late sad loss, by reading 'Clarissa,' a book which the doctor, ever watchful in the interests of virtue, presented to Mrs. Esther with a speech of condolence. He said that it was a work whose perusal could not fail most strongly to console her spirit and to dispose her for resignation; while for purity of morals, for justice of observation, and for knowledge of the human heart, it was unequalled in any language. He then made a digression, and

compared the work with the ancient Greek romances. Adventure, he said, was to be found in Heliodorus, and the story told by Apuleius of Cupid and Psyche was exquisitely pathetic; yet none of the earlier writers could be compared, or even named in the same breath, with Mr. Richardson, who reminded him especially of Sophocles, in the tenderness with which he prepared the minds of his audience for the impending tragedy which he could not alter or abate, seeing that it was the will of Necessity. There was nothing, he went on to say, more calculated to inspire or to strengthen sentiments of virtue in the breasts of the young —and especially in the young of the feminine sex—than a contemplation of Clarissa's virtue and Lovelace's wickedness. We were greatly edified by these praises, coming from so great a scholar and one so eminently fitted to discourse on virtue. We received the work, prepared (so far as I was concerned) to partake of food for reflection of the satisfying kind (so that the reader quickly lays aside the work while he meditates for a few days on what he has read) which is supplied by

the pious 'Drelincourt on Death,' Hervey's 'Meditations among the Tombs, or Young's 'Night Thoughts.'

'After dinner, my dear,' said Mrs. Esther, 'you shall read it aloud to me. Do not stop if I shut my eyes in order to hear the better. These good books should be carefully listened to, and read very slowly. Otherwise their lessons may be overlooked, and this would be a sad pity after all the good doctor's trouble in first reading the book for us. What scholarship, Kitty! and what a passion, nay, what an ardour, for virtue animates that reverend heart!'

I cannot but pause here to ask whether if Mr. Richardson had chosen to depict to the life the character of a clergyman, who had fallen into such ways as my uncle, with his sins, his follies, his degradation, the doctor would himself have laid it to heart? Alas! I fear not. We know not ourselves as we are: we still go dreaming we are something better than we seem to others: we have a second and unreal self: the shafts of the satirist seem to pierce the hearts of others. I am sure that many a Lovelace, fresh from

the ruin of another Clarissa (if, indeed, there could be another creature so incomparable), must have read this great romance with tears of pity and indignation. Otherwise the race of Lovelaces would long since have become extinct.

We received, therefore, 'Clarissa,' expecting edification, but not joy. We even put it aside for a week, because Mrs. Esther hardly felt herself, at first, strong enough to begin a new book, which might flood her mind with new ideas and make her unsettled. At last, however, she felt that we must no longer postpone obeying the doctor.

'Only a short chapter, my dear, to begin with. Heavens! how shall we struggle through eight long volumes?'

I shall be ever thankful that it was my duty to read these dear delightful pages of this great romance. You may judge of our joy when we read on, day after day, hurrying over household work in the morning, neglecting our walks abroad, and wasting candlelight in the evening the more to enjoy it. We laid aside the book from time to time while we wept over the author's pathetic

scenes. Oh, the horrid usage of poor Clarissa! Was ever girl more barbarously served? Was ever man so wicked as her lover? Were parents ever so blinded by prejudice? Had girl ever so unkind a brother—ever so perverse a sister? I thought of her all day long, and at night I dreamed of her: the image of Clarissa was never absent from my brain.

Everything in the book was as real to me as the adventures of Robinson Crusoe or those of Christian on his pilgrimage from the City of Destruction. So long as the reading of this immortal book lasted—we read page after page twice, thrice, or four times over, to get out of them the fullest measure of sympathy, sorrow, and delight—we loved with Clarissa: her sorrows were ours: we breathed and talked Clarissa: Mrs. Esther even prayed, I believe—though the book was already printed, and therefore it was too late for prayer—that the poor, sweet innocent might escape the clutches of her wicked lover, who, sure, was more a demon than a man: we carried the thought of Clarissa even to church with us.

We invited our friends to share with us this new-found joy. Solomon Stallabras was always ready to weep with us over a dish of tea. Never any man had a heart more formed for the tenderest sensibility. Pity that his nose was so broad and so much turned up! Otherwise, this natural tenderness might have been manifested in his countenance. While I read he gazed upon my face, and was fain, from time to time, to draw forth his handkerchief and wipe the tears from his streaming eyes.

'Stop, Miss Kitty!' he would say; 'let us pause awhile: let us come back to virtue and ourselves. It is too much: the spectacle of so much youth and beauty, so much innocence—the fate of our poor Clarissa—read by a nymph whose lot is so below her merits—it is too much, Mrs. Pimpernel—it is indeed!'

In some way, while I read, this poet, whose imagination, as became his profession, was strong, mixed up Clarissa with myself, and imagined that my ending might be in some way similar to that of the heroine. Now, with Solomon Stallabras, to think was to

believe. Nothing was wanting but a Lovelace. I believe that he waited about the market in hopes of finding him lurking in some corner. Perhaps he even suspected poor Sir Miles. Had he found him, he assured Mrs. Esther, he fully intended to pierce him to the heart with a spit or skewer from one of the butchers' stalls ; adding that it would be sweet for him to die, even from the cart at Tyburn, for my sake. But no Lovelace was trying to make me leave my shelter with Mrs. Esther.

Sometimes Sir Miles Lackington came to join in the reading, but we found him wanting in sensibility. Without that quality, Richardson's novels cannot be enjoyed. He inclined rather to the low humour which makes men enjoy Fielding's 'Tom Jones,' or Smollett's 'Peregrine Pickle'—works full, no doubt, of a coarse vitality which some men like, but quite wanting in the delicate shades of feeling that commend an author to the delicacy of gentlewomen. And to think that old Samuel Richardson was nothing but a printer by trade ! Heaven, which denied this most precious gift of creation to such tender and

poetic souls as that of Solomon Stallabras, vouchsafed to bestow it upon a printer—a mechanical printer, who, if he was not paid for setting up type himself, yet employed common workmen, superintended their labours, paid them their wages, and put profits into his purse. It seems incredible, but then Shakespeare was only an actor.

'The sunshine of genius,' said Solomon, 'falls upon the children of the lowly as well as those of the rich. I am myself a scion of Fetter Lane.'

Sometimes, indeed, Sir Miles Lackington was so wanting in delicacy, and so rude as to laugh at us for our tears.

'You cry over Richardson,' he said; 'but if I were to bring you "Tom Jones" I warrant you would laugh.'

'"Tom Jones,"' said Mrs. Esther, 'is clearly a work of coarseness. Ladies do not wish to laugh. The laws of decorum forbid unrestrained mirth to females of good breeding. Fielding may suit the pewter pots of the tavern; Richardson goes best with the silver service of the mansion.'

We looked about us as if our room was the

mansion and our cupboard was lined with silver dishes.

Sir Miles laughed again.

'Give me a pewter mug well filled and often filled,' he said, 'with "Tom Jones" to bear it company, and I ask no more. "Clarissa" and the silver service may remain with you, ladies. Strange, however, that folk should prefer a printer to a gentleman. Why, Fielding comes of an honourable house.'

'Gentle blood,' replied Mrs. Esther, 'does not, unfortunately, always bring the gifts of poetry and sensibility. You are yourself of gentle birth, Sir Miles, yet you own that you love not Richardson. Many great authors have been of lowly extraction, and Mr. Stallabras was saying finely but yesterday, that the sunshine of genius falls upon the children of the poor as often as upon those of the rich.'

Solomon inclined his head and coloured; Sir Miles laughed again in his easy fashion.

'But,' he said, 'Mr. Richardson knows nothing about the polite *ton*. His men are master tradesmen disguised in swords and scarlet coats; they are religious tradesmen, wicked tradesmen, and so forth; but they

are not gentlemen; they cannot talk, think, or walk, write, or act like gentlemen. If we want to read about polite society, let us at least ask gentlemen to write for us.'

Sir Miles read little, yet his judgment was generally right, and since I have seen the society of which Richardson wrote, I have learned that he was right in this case; for Richardson, pathetic and powerful as he is, had certainly never been among the class whose manners and conversation he attempted to pourtray.

Presently we finished 'Clarissa' with floods of tears. I believe that no book was ever written which has caused so many tears as this work. Just then it was about the end of the year: we had already eaten our Christmas plum porridge in the darkest and deadest time of the year, the time when fogs fall over the town by day and stop all work: when nights are long and days short: when the market was quiet at night because it was too cold to stand about or to lie in the open: when all the fighting and brawling were over before five o'clock, and the evenings were tranquil though they were long. It was just

after we ended our book, and were still tearful under its influence, that our deliverance came to us.

I think it was on the 31st of December in that same year of grace, seventeen hundred and fifty, in which I had come to the Liberties, and twenty-nine full years with some eleven months since the poor ladies had been incarcerated. I well remember the day, though not certain of the date. It was evening: we had finished work: supper was on the table when we should care to take it—bread and an excellent Dutch cheese; the candle was extinguished, and we were sitting before the fire. Mrs. Esther was talking, as women love sometimes to talk, about the little things they remember: she was telling me—not for the first time—of the great frost of 1714, when she was a young girl, and of the fair which they held upon the ice; of the dreadful scare there was in 1718 from the number of highwaymen and footpads, for whose apprehension the Government offered as much as £100 a head; of Orator Henley, who began to preach in Clare Market shortly after the ladies came to the Fleet; of the

dreadful storm in 1739, which killed the famous colony of sparrows in the Mile End Road; of the long frost of 1739, when from Christmas unto February the poor watermen and fishermen could not earn a single penny; of the fever of 1741; of the banishment of papists before the Pretender's landing, in 1744; of the great Rebellion of 1745, when the city so nobly did its duty.

'My dear,' she said, 'we, that is the citizens, because the prisoners of the Fleet and the persons who enjoy the Liberties could hardly be expected to contribute money or aught but prayers—and most of the poor creatures but little used to praying! —raised twelve thousand shirts with as many garments to correspond, ten thousand woollen caps (to serve, I suppose, as night-caps for our brave fellows when they slept in the open air), ten thousand pairs of stockings, twelve thousand gloves, a thousand blankets—which only makes one blanket for twelve men, but I hope they took turns about — and nine thousand spatterdashes. There was a camp on Finchley Common, of which we heard but did not visit; the militia

were kept in readiness—a double watch was set at every one of the city gates; there were some in the Liberties, who thought that a successful invasion of England might lead to the burning of account-books, registers, ledgers, and warrants, in which case we might all get out and keep out. For my own part, my dear, and for my sister Deborah's part, I am happy to say that we preferred the Protestant succession even to our own freedom, and wished for no such lawless ending to a captivity however unjust, but prayed night and day for the confusion of the young Pretender. Happily our prayers were answered, and great George preserved.'

Then we talked of the past year, how it had brought Mrs. Esther a daughter—as she was good enough to say—and taken away a sister. She cried a little over her loss, but presently recovered, and taking my hand in hers, said many kind and undeserved things to me, who had been often petulant and troublesome: as that we must not part, who had been so strangely brought together, unless my happiness should take me away from the Fleet (I thought, then, of my husband,

and wondered if he would ever come to take me away), and then said that as we were at New Year's Eve, we should make good resolutions for the next year, which were to be kept resolutely, not broken and thrown away; that for her part, she designed, if I agreed and consented to the change, to call me niece, and I should call her aunt, by which mutual adoption of each other our affection and duty one towards the other would be strengthened and founded, as it were, on a sure and stable basis.

'Not, my dear,' she added, 'that you can ever call yourself a Pimpernel—an honour granted to few—or that you should ever wish to change your name; but in all other respects you shall be the same as if you were indeed my own niece, the daughter of my brother (but I never had one) or sister (but I had only one, and she was as myself). Truly the Pleydells are a worthy family of whom we have no need to be ashamed.'

I was assuring her that nothing could alter my love and gratitude for her exceeding kindness, when we heard footsteps and voices on the stairs, and presently a knock at the door,

and the doctor stood before us. Behind him were Sir Miles Lackington and Solomon Stallabras.

'Madam,' said the doctor, 'I wish you a good evening, with the compliments of the season. Merry as well as happy may you be next year.'

I declare that directly I saw his face, my heart leaped into my mouth. I *knew* that he was come with great and glorious news. For his eyes glowed with the light of some suppressed knowledge, and a capacious smile began with his lips and glowed over the vast expanse of his ruddy cheeks.

'Merry, doctor—no. But happy if God will.'

'Ta! ta! ta! we shall see,' he replied. 'Now, madam, I have a thing to say which will take some time to say. I have taken the liberty of bringing with me a bottle of good old port, the best to be procured, which strengthens the nerves and acts as a sovereign cordial in cases of sudden excitement. Besides, it is to-night New Year's Eve, when all should rejoice." He produced the bottle from under his gown and placed it

on the table. 'I have also taken the liberty to bring with me our friends and well-wishers, Sir Miles Lackington and Mr. Stallabras, partly to—to—' here he remembered that a corkscrew was not likely to be among our possessions—'to draw the cork of the bottle, a thing which Sir Miles does with zeal and propriety.' The Baronet with great gravity advanced and performed the operation by a dexterous handling of the poker, which detached the upper part of the neck. 'So,' continued the doctor; 'and partly that they too, who have been so long our true and faithful friends, may hear what I have to say, and so that we may all rejoice together, and, if need be, sing psalms with merry hearts.'

Merry hearts? Were we to sing psalms with merry hearts in the place where for thirty years every day had brought with it its own suffering and disgrace to this poor lady?

Yet, what news could the doctor have which made his purple face so glad, as if the sunlight instead of our fire of cannel coal was shining full upon it?

'Kitty child,' he went on, 'light candles: not one candle—two candles, three candles, four candles—all the candles you have in the place; we will have an illumination. Sir Miles, will you please to sit? Mr. Stallabras, will you take Kitty's chair? She will be occupied in serving. Glasses, child, for this honourable company. Why'—he banged his fist upon the table, but with consideration, for it was not so strong as his own great table—'why, I am happier this night than ever I have been before, I think, in all my life. Such a story as I have to tell!'

I placed on the table the three candlesticks which formed all our stock, and set candles in them and lit them. I put out such glasses as we had, and then I stood beside Mrs. Esther's chair and took her hand in mine. I knew not what to expect, yet I was certain that it was something very good for Mrs. Esther. Had it been for me, the doctor would have sent for me; or for himself, he would have told it without this prodigality of joy. Surely it must be for my good patron and protector! My pulses were

bounding, and I could see that Mrs. Esther, too, was rapidly rising to the same excitement.

'Certain I am,' said Sir Miles, 'that something has happened. Doctor, let us quickly congratulate you. Let us drink your health. I burn to drink some one's health.'

'Should something have happened,' said the poet, 'I would it were something good for ladies who shall be nameless.'

'Stay,' said the doctor. He stood while the rest were sitting. He thus increased the natural advantage of his great proportions. 'We are not yet come to the drinking of healths. But, Mrs. Pimpernel, I must first invite you, before I go on with what I have to say, to take a glass of this most generous vintage. The grapes which produced it grew fat and strong in thinking of the noble part they were about to fulfil: the sunshine of Spain passed into their juices and filled them with the spirit of strength and confidence: that spirit lies imprisoned in the bottle before us——'

'It does—it does!' murmured Sir Miles, gazing thoughtfully at the bottle.

'He ought to have been a poet!' whispered Solomon.

The doctor looked round impatiently, and swept the folds of his gown behind him with a large gesture.

'For what did the grapes rejoice? Why was the vintage more than commonly rich? Because in the fulness of time it was destined to comfort the heart and to strengthen the courage of a most worthy and cruelly tried lady. Indeed, Mrs. Pimpernel, wonderful are the decrees of heaven! Drink, madam.'

He poured out a glass of wine and handed it to her. She stared in his face almost stupidly: she was trying to repress a wild thought which seized her: her lips were parted, her gaze fixed, her hands trembling.

'Drink it, madam,' ordered the doctor.

'What is it? oh! what is it?' she cried.

'Drink the wine, madam,' said Sir Miles, kindly. 'Believe me, the wine will give you courage.'

I took the glass and held it to her lips, while she drank submissively.

'With a bottle of port before him,' said Sir Miles, encouragingly, 'a man may have

patience for anything. With the help of such a friend, would I receive with resignation and joy, good fortune for myself or disasters to all my cousins, male and female. Go on, doctor. The lady hath taken one glass to prepare her palate for the next.'

'Patience, now,' said the doctor, 'and silence, all of you. Solomon Stallabras, if you liken me again to a poet, you shall leave this room, and lose the joy of hearing what I have to tell.

'It is now some three months that the thought came into my mind of investigating the case of certain prisoners lying forgotten in the prison or dragging along a wretched existence in the Rules. It matters not what these cases were, or how I have sped in my search. One case, however, has filled me with gratitude and joy because—madam,' he turned suddenly on poor Mrs. Esther, 'you will please to listen patiently. This case concerns the unhappy fate of two poor ladies. Their history, gentlemen'—oh! why could he not get on faster?—'is partly known to you. They were daughters of a most worthy and respected city merchant who, in

his time, served many civic offices with dignity and usefulness, including the highest. He was a benefactor to his parish, beautified his church, and died leaving behind him two young daughters, the youngest of whom came of age in the year 1720. To each of them he left a large fortune, no less than twenty thousand pounds. Alas! gentlemen, this money, placed in the hands of their guardian and trustee, a friend as honourable as the late Lord Mayor himself, the ladies' father, namely Alderman Medlicott, was in the year 1720 shamefully pillaged and stolen by the alderman's clerk, one Christopher March, insomuch that (the alderman having gone mad by reason of his losses) the poor girls had no longer any fortune or any friends to help, for in that bad time most all the merchants were hit, and everyone had to look after himself as best he could. Also this plundering villain had so invested part of their money, in their own name by forgeries, as to make them liable for large sums which they had not the means of paying. They were therefore arrested and confined in the prison hard by, where under

the rule of the rogue Bambridge they suffered many things which it is painful to recall or to think about. Presently, however, that tormentor and plague of the human race—*captivorum flagellum*—scourge of innocent captives and languishing debtors, having been mercifully removed, and having hung himself like Judas and so gone to his own place, these ladies found the necessary security which ensures for all of us this partial liberty, the with opportunity, should we embrace it, of improving the golden hours. In other words, gentlemen, they came out of the prison, and have ever since dwelt amongst us in this place.

'Gentlemen, we have with us here many improvident and foolish persons who have mostly by their own misconduct reduced themselves to our unhappy condition. It needs not that in this place, which is not a pulpit, I should speak of those who have gambled away their property'—Sir Miles shook his head—'or drank it away'—Sir Miles stared straight at the ceiling—'or have missed their chances, or been forgotten by Fortune'—Mr. Stallabras groaned. 'Of

these things I will not speak. But it is a thing notorious to all of us that the Liberties are not the chosen home of virtue. Here temperance, sobriety, morality, gentle words, courteous bearing, truth, honour, kindness of thought, and charity—which seeketh not her own—are rarely illustrated and discourteously entreated. Wherefore, I say, that for two ladies to have steadfastly resisted all the temptations of this place, and to have exhibited, so that all might copy, the exemplar of a perfect Christian life during thirty years, is a fact which calls for the gratitude as well as the astonishment of the wondering Rules.'

'He *ought* to have been a——' began Solomon Stallabras, wiping a sympathetic tear, but caught the doctor's frowning eye and stopped; 'an—an Archbishop,' he added presently, with a little hesitation.

'Sir,' said the doctor, 'you are right. I ought to have been an archbishop. Many an archbishop's Latin verses have been poor indeed compared with mine. But to proceed. Madam, I would fain not be tedious.'

'Oh, sir,' said Mrs. Esther, whose brain seemed confused with this strange exordium.

'After thirty years or thereabouts of most undeserved captivity and forced retirement from the polite world—which they were born to adorn—these ladies found themselves by the will of providence forced to separate One of them winged her glad flight to heaven, the other was permitted to remain awhile below. It was then that I began to investigate the conditions of their imprisonment. Madam,' he turned suddenly to Mrs. Esther, so that she started in her chair and trembled violently, 'think of what you would most wish : name no trifling matter ; it is not a gift of a guinea or two, the bettering of a meal, the purchase of a blanket, the helping of a poor family ; no boon or benefit of a day or two. Let your imagination rove, set her free, think boldly, aim high, think of the best and most desirable thing of all.'

She tried to speak, her lips parted ; she half rose, catching at my hand : but her words were refused utterance ; her cheek grew so pale and white that I thought she would have swooned and seized her in my arms, being so much stronger and bigger. Then I

ventured to speak, being moved myself to a flood of tears.

'Oh, madam! dear madam! the doctor is not jesting with you; he hath in his hands the thing that we desire most of all. He brings you, I am sure, great news — the greatest. Oh, sir'—I spoke now for her who was struck dumb with hope, fear, and astonishment—'what can this poor lady want but her release from this dreadful place? What can she pray for, what can she ask, morning and night, after all these years of companionship with profligates, spendthrifts, rogues, and villains, the noisy market-people, the poor suffering women and children of this den of infamy, but her deliverance? Sir, if you have brought her that, tell her so at once, to ease her mind.'

'Well said, Kitty,' cried Sir Miles. 'Doctor, speak out.'

'No poet—not even Alexander Pope—could have spoken more eloquently,' cried Solomon Stallabras.

As for Mrs. Esther, she drew herself gently from me, and stood with her handkerchief in

her hand, and tears in her eyes, her poor thin figure trembling.

'I have brought with me,' said the doctor, taking her hand and kissing it, 'the release of the most innocent prisoner in the world.'

She steadied herself for a few moments. Then she spoke clearly and calmly.

'That,' she said, 'has ever been the utmost of my desire. I have desired it so long and so vehemently (with my sister Deborah, to whom it has been granted) that it has become part of my very being. I have desired it, I think, even more than my sister. Thirty years have I been a prisoner in the Fleet, though for twenty-six in the enjoyment of these (so-called) Liberties. Gentlemen, you know full well what manner of life has been ours; you know the sights, the sounds, the wickednesses of this place.' Here Sir Miles hung his head. 'I am, as the doctor most kindly hath told you, a gentlewoman born; my father, besides being a great and honourable merchant of this most noble city of London, once Lord Mayor, an Alderman of Portsoken Ward, and Worshipful Master of the Company of Armour Scourers, was

also a true Christian man, and taught us early the doctrines and virtues of the true faith. We were educated as heiresses; we were delicately brought up in the love of duty and religion; too delicately for women fated to herd with the worst, and bear the worst. It is, therefore, no merit of ours if we have behaved, according to our lights, as Christian gentlewomen. Yet, sirs, kind friends, it has been great unhappiness to us; bear with me a little, for when I think of my sister's sufferings, and my own, I fain must weep. It has been, believe me, great, great unhappiness.'

I think we all wept with her. Yet it was astonishing to see with what quiet dignity she spoke, resuming, at a moment's notice, the air not only of a gentlewoman, which she had never lost, but of one who is no longer troubled by being in a false position, and can command, as well as receive, respect. I saw before me a great city lady, as she had been trained and brought up to be. Small though she was, her dignity made her tall—as her unmerited sufferings and patience made her great.

Sir Miles laid his hand on the poet's shoulder.

'Great heaven!' he cried. 'Canst thou weep any more over the misfortunes of Clarissa, with this poor lady's sorrows in thy recollection?'

The doctor wiped his eyes. But for those backslidings which we have already lamented, what an admirable character, how full of generosity, how full of sympathy, how kind of heart, was my uncle!

'Pray, madam,' he said, 'be seated again. Will you take another glass of wine?'

'No, doctor,' she replied. 'This is now no case for the help of wine. Pray finish the story of your benevolent care.'

'Why, madam, as for benevolence,' he said, 'I have but done what Sir Miles Lackington or Solomon Stallabras'—the poet spread his arms and tapped his breast—'would have done, had they possessed the power of doing; what, indeed, this crying slip of a girl would have done had she known how. Benevolence! Are we, then, Old Bailey prisoners, chained by the leg until the time comes for us to go forth to Tyburn Tree? Are we

common rogues and vagabonds, that have no bowels? Can such a life as yours be contemplated with unmoved eyes? Is Sir Miles a Lovelace for hardness of heart? or Solomon Stallabras a salamander? Am I a Nero? Nay, madam, speak no more of benevolence. Know. then, that of all the people whom the conduct of the villain Christopher March with regard to your affairs injured, but two are left alive. The heirs of the rest are scattered and dispersed. These two have prospered, and are generous as well as old; their hearts melted at the tale of suffering; they have agreed together to give back to you, not only the security which keeps you here, but also a formal release of your debt to them; you can go whenever you please.'

'Why, then,' shouted Sir Miles, grasping the bottle, 'we can drink her——'

'Stay,' said the doctor. 'There is one thing more. This generous gift restores to you, not only liberty, but also your father's country estate in Hertfordshire, worth six hundred pounds a year. And here, madam, are the papers which vouch for all. You

have now your own estate, and are once more a gentlewoman of fortune and position.'

She took the papers, and held them grasped tightly in her lap.

'And now, gentlemen,' said the doctor, gently taking the bottle from the baronet's hands, 'we will drink—you, too, Kitty, my dear, must join—a happy new year to Mrs Esther Pimpernel.'

They drank it with no more words; and Sir Miles fell on his knees and kissed her hand, but without speaking aught.

Mrs. Esther sat still and quiet, trying to recover herself; but the first eloquence would not return, and she could not speak for crying and sobbing. In broken words she said, while she caught the doctor's great hand and held it, that he had been, in very sooth, her guardian angel; that it was he who had rescued her sister and herself from the monster Bambridge and the horrors of the prison; that, but for him, they would long ago have starved; that, but for him, she should have languished for the rest of her days in the Rules. Then she prayed

that God would reward the protector and defender of the poor.

The doctor drew away his hand, and, without a word, walked out of the room with hanging head, followed by Sir Miles and Mr. Stallabras.

'We shall go, my sweet Kitty; together we shall leave this dreadful place,' she murmured when we were alone. 'What is mine is yours, my child. Let us humbly to our knees.'

END OF VOL. I.

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